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BIHAR YOGA®

Yoga Education for Children

Volume Two

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

**Yoga Education
for Children**
Volume Two



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GOLDEN JUBILEE

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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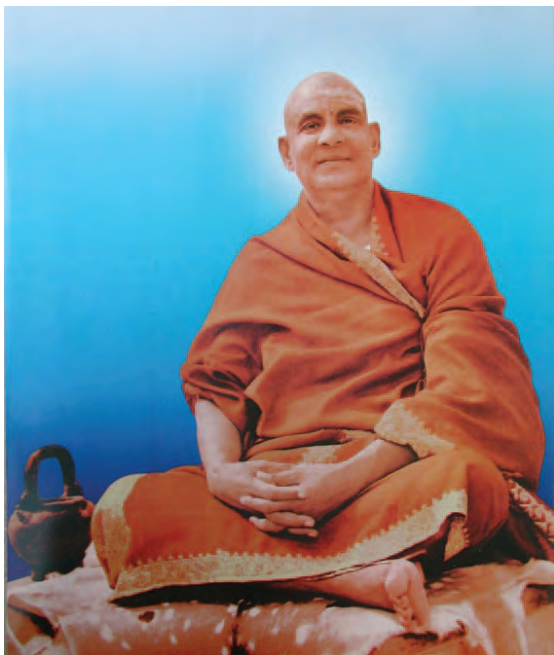
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

Editor's Note

(From Canadian edition)

Dedicated to our gurus, Paramguru Swami Sivananda, Guru Satyananda Paramahansa and Guru Niranjanananda Paramahansa, who have started a movement of revival in India through children. The large number of children teaching yoga is laying a foundation for a different culture. Yoga is the culture of tomorrow.

The inspiration

Swami Sivananda was the wellspring that touched many, who in turn have collectively brought about a yoga revolution worldwide. He is the innovator of a true yoga renaissance.

The prime motivator

Swami Satyananda Saraswati, also known as Paramahansa Satyananda, one of the many disciples of Swami Sivananda, has achieved and set the example of how a sannyasin can remain detached yet be so completely involved in enriching the lives of those around him spiritually, culturally, and physically.

The prime mover

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, also known as Paramahansa Niranjanananda, chief disciple and successor to Sri Swamiji, is an inspiration to all. His wide exposure to international cultures, and his playful personality enable him to connect easily with children and youth. While bringing to fruition the ideas of his guru and paramguru, Swamiji seems to be in many places at one time. He moves between Munger, Rikhiya and the rest of the world like a butterfly that brings beauty, grace and joy to whatever he touches, wherever he goes.

The foundation of guru's vision

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati (Satsangi) has become a mother to thousands of children, and through her guidance an ever growing number of children's lives are being touched by this contact with her and others in the ashram environment. Adding all this young energy to the ashram environment has been a spectacular achievement. She is a true inspiration to the women and girls of the area.

Compiler and contributor

Rishi Arundhati Saraswati (Janie Lee Lauer), BA (Psych), Univ. of Newcastle on Tyne, UK, specialist in infant and child development and cognitive development, has been teaching Bihar (Satyananda) Yoga since 1968. She produced the first volume of *Yoga Education for Children* in 1985, and is the founder of Y.E.S., the Association for Yoga Education in Schools. She was born in 1937 in Tennessee, USA, and there met Rishi Vasishthananda and was introduced to yoga.

Editor

Rishi Vasishthananda Saraswati (Dr Peter Ernst Lauer), BA (Phil), Univ. of Alabama, MA (Phil), Emory University, Georgia, and PhD (Computer Science), Queen's University, Belfast, has been teaching meditation and yoga philosophy in the Bihar Yoga/Satyananda Yoga tradition since 1968. He has also been a pioneer in the development and teaching of computer science in Europe and North America. He was born in 1934 in Teplitz Schoenau, Czechoslovakia.



Rishis Arundhati and Vasishthananda have been associated with Swami Satyananda Saraswati since 1968, and have co-founded and served as acharyas of Satyananda ashrams and yoga centres in Northern Ireland (1969), Austria (1970), England (1975–84) and Canada (1984 to present). They received manasi sannyasa diksha in 1968 and rishi sannyasa in 2006.

Contributors

Dr. Chandrajyoti Saraswati (Prof. U.M. Luedtke) is professor of Special Needs Education at University of Duesseldorf, Germany.

Swami Nirmalratna Saraswati taught in the junior school of Van Asch College for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children, Christchurch, New Zealand, and has been serving in Munger as a sannyasin for many years.

Rama Ranee is a research member for the Diagnostic and Research Centre, Spastic Society of Karnataka, Bangalore, India.

Swami Yogaratna Saraswati, teacher and teacher trainer in Australia, served for over 20 years in Atma Darshan Yogashram, the Bangalore branch of Bihar School of Yoga. Here she developed the ‘Fun Yoga for Kids’ program – one of her favourites.

Sannyasi Nawaratri (Ayesha Venkatrao-Holcombe), Satyananda Yoga Centre, Austin, Texas.

Swami Vimalratna Saraswati, born in Australia, served at Satyananda Ashram, Bogotá, Colombia.

Vikas Kumar, as yuva yogi started the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal in Munger, then earned a MA in Yoga Psychology from Bihar Yoga Bharati. He is presently teaching in India.

Pallavi Prakash, born in Munger, is one of the very first ‘bal yoginis’.

Swami Kriyabhava Saraswati, a teacher from Australia, has been serving at Rikhiapeeth since 2000.

Sinu Kumari is a graduate Rikhiya kanya from Kanak, Sadan, Pania Pagar, Rikhiya.

Sannyasi Bhaktipushpa (Elizabeth White), born in Jamaica, the first of twins, studied and now teaches Fine Art at an International School in Jamaica. She completed the four-month Diploma Course at Bihar Yoga Bharati in 2004.

Kathryn Gastmeier, like her twin sister, is an artist. She trained at the University of Waterloo, Canada, where she lives with her family.

Keisha Quinn, born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, illustrated the Magic Carpet Rides at the age of twelve. She is already a budding yogi and spends much of her time, when not at school, working to save the environment.

Maria Capurro is an artist and nursery school teacher in Montevideo, Uruguay. She uses yoga techniques designed by R.Y.E. (Research on Yoga in Education) and herself for instilling intellectual creativity and ethical behaviours in the children in her care.

Association for Yoga Education in Schools (Y.E.S.)

A charitable and educational association founded by Rishis Vasishthananda and Arundhati Saraswati in Canada and USA in 1990. Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the patron of Y.E.S.

Y.E.S. is an instrument for bringing about an increase in awareness of the positive effects of yogic discipline in the school and at home. The aims of Y.E.S. are:

- to inform school teachers of the tools offered by yoga for developing the body, mind and emotions of those children in their care.
- to promote a thorough understanding of cognitive and physical development in children and youths by yoga teachers of children, parents and caregivers.
- to provide the opportunity for youth empowerment by training children and youths to become yoga instructors.
- to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas on yoga for children.
- to provide ideas on how the goals of Y.E.S. can be achieved.

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Introduction

I visited India and the ashram for the first time in 1999. Very soon after arriving, Swamiji Niranjanananda Saraswati suggested that it was time to think about the second volume of *Yoga Education for Children*. It has been some time since the first volume was published in 1985 in England, and in 1992 by Bihar School of Yoga in India. I am still actively involved with children and already had a few ideas I was using on the computer, so I started looking around for contributions to a new volume.

Since the first volume was published, the need for yoga education for children has been taken for granted. Not only in India today, but in many western countries, it is big business. Within India there are thousands of children and youths, not only doing yoga themselves, but teaching it to their peers, as well as giving health advice often to their teachers. So, the major purpose of the book is to stimulate those who work or interact with children to be creative in their use of yoga practices, to get across their subject matter and at the same time benefit the body, mind and emotions of the children, empowering them to become creative, emotionally stable citizens of the future.

The first volume was compiled and printed as a commemorative issue for Swami Niranjanananda, with inspiration from Swami Satyananada Saraswati. In the first volume, a lot of emphasis was on yoga for the pre-school child, including

ideas for using yoga techniques in the school classroom to bring about an atmosphere conducive for learning easily. The first volume had three parts: Education, Therapy and Techniques, and has been used extensively in many countries. Ideas from it were used in the article 'Om a little Teapot', in the February 2001 issue of TIME magazine, although no credit was given. It has also been translated into Russian, Danish, Spanish, Portuguese, Farsi and Hindi and will soon appear in French and Italian. It received a recommendation as the best book available for those wanting to teach yoga to children in a review of the newsletter for the International Association of Yoga Therapist.

The inspiration for this volume of *Yoga Education for Children* has been Swami Niranjanananda. Having lived the life of yoga since childhood, he is the perfect inspiration for adults and children. At the age of eleven he left India and came to Northern Ireland and then to England, before going on to Colombia, Australia and later in his teens, to the USA.

I had the fortune to meet him in the September of 1972. Swami Vasishthananda and I had moved to Newcastle upon Tyne, England, in June that year when Vasishtha took up his post at the university. We had just found and purchased the house that was to become the yoga centre for the following twelve years, when we were told to go to Northern Ireland, pick up Swami Niranjanananda and bring him to live with us.

It was fall, school was beginning, Swamiji was twelve, so we took him to the nearest school and he was tested by the principal who placed him in the grade with his peers, 2L3, even though Swamiji had never attended school previously. After a week, Swamiji came home and told Swami Vasishtha that he was being taught second form math and he did not know first form math. Vasishtha told him to find out the name of the book used in first form and where one could purchase it. After two weeks, Swamiji had worked through the whole book on first form math with Swami Vasishtha. Every couple of weeks, Swamiji was given a test and moved up a class, so very soon he was appointed head boy.

During his stay with us, I would often be invited to give a talk about yoga. Swamiji would accompany me to these lectures. It did not matter if I spoke for thirty minutes or one hour, Swamiji sat in an asana beside me, completely still all throughout the talk. The women, especially mothers, were quite impressed with that. Someone so young, with so much self-composure, self-control and self-discipline; they had never seen anything like it. This does not mean he missed his 'childhood'; he is still as playful as he was then.

Swamiji was also very creative at this time. It seems he got the hang of driving by backing our car, an Alfa Romero GT Jr sports car, in and out of the garage.

This second volume has four parts: Education, Special Needs Children, Youth Empowerment and Techniques. One aim of this second volume of *Yoga Education for Children* is to look at the real goal of education and Swami Niranjanananda has directed his remarks to parents and mothers in particular. For the yogi, education does not begin at age six or seven but begins while the child is still in the womb and within the home environment.

In this volume we also wanted to look at the role of yoga for special needs children, giving some references to work that is being done to introduce yoga into special needs education. Practical instructions for classes with these children are included.

Youth empowerment is taking place in both Munger, Bihar, and Rikhia, Jharkhand. The Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (BYMM), the Children's Yoga Fellowship, a brainchild of Swami Niranjanananda, is to my mind the future for teaching yoga to children: children teaching children. In this part of the new volume, we can see how this came about and look at some research done by BYMM on personality and memory in children, as well as a chapter for the *yuva yogis* (teenagers). The bal yoga activities began in 1996 and its rapid spread among the children and youth in Bihar is amazing. They are very special individuals aged seven to twenty-four years, some having been a part of the movement from the

beginning. Whether they are seven or twenty-four years old, whatever they are given to do, they do with the greatest care and attention and are quite proud to have been asked to do the job. Imagine most children and teenagers in the West, if asked to rake leaves or stand guard at the gate. With most it is usually quite an ordeal just to get them to tidy their own rooms. These children and youth have been empowered not only to succeed but to help others to succeed.

In Rikhia there is also a lot of activity involving children and education. In this area of Jharkhand a large proportion of the population are tribals. This means that they are among the poorest people in many ways, materially and educationally. Most of these villagers are farmers. To date, approximately two thousand children from the villages of Rikhia attend the ashram daily. At the ashram their major aim is to learn English, Hindi and Sanskrit languages and they are taught many forms of yoga as well. Their abilities to learn and absorb the teaching has made them capable of carrying out duties at one of the major festivals in Jharkhand – *Sat Chandi Mahayajna*: leading the thousands of participants in kirtan, opening and closing the program, directing the flow of people in and out of the program, using both their acquired English and Hindi fluently. These children are receiving the education that was denied their parents and grandparents due to financial circumstances. They are being empowered to take their lives into their own hands and have dreams of a future filled with promise.

In this second volume themed classes are introduced. For example, yoga games, art and yoga, and yoga magic Carpet rides for geography. Although these are suitable for children of all ages, this book has a strong emphasis on children aged from five to twelve years. There is enough material included in this volume to keep teachers busy, not only using the text as provided, but being creative themselves so they can make the sessions fun, interesting, informative and promote fitness at the same time.

Here too, we have thoroughly considered the technique of yoga nidra and other forms of meditation practices to be used very effectively with children and youth. Pratyahara and dharana, relaxation and concentration, can be practised in many ways. So, we have briefly introduced many different approaches to these techniques necessary to facilitate easier learning.

In this new volume there has been a lot of direct interaction between myself and other contributors. I have had a chance to meet many interesting people through our interactions and hope that we have come up with some ideas that the readers will find stimulating and useful.

As Swami Satyananda has said,

Yoga is our birthright today, and the culture of tomorrow.

Compiler and Contributor
Rishi Arundhati Saraswati
30 November 2008

Analysis and Synopsis

PART I: EDUCATION

Chapter 1: The Purpose of Education

The opening paragraphs of Swami Sivananda Saraswati's discourse on the purpose of education state the credo of self-empowerment and youth-empowerment through yoga, which has become the inspiration for this book and for the formation of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, under the skilful guidance of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, as well as for the development of the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia under the watchful eye of Swami Satyananda Saraswati and careful cultivation by Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati. Both examples of youth empowerment and societal benefits harvested from such empowerment are the subjects of a number of chapters of this book. Swami Sivananda also stresses the notion of gurukul-based education which is evident in Rikhia, as the children spend a large amount of time in the ashram daily. One could even say that they dwell at the ashram all the time, since their entire daily activities are performed in the spirit of the ashram. Munger is cultivating a gurukul system, as will become clear from later chapters. Swami Sivananda states that "the regeneration of the individual and the young generation means the betterment of the whole nation."

Swami Sivananda also focuses on the importance of early education which becomes the theme of a number of

contributions to this book. Swami Sivananda finally gives lasting practical advice to those educating the very young on the basis of the disciplines of yoga. Such practical advice is also given by the experienced authors contributing to this book.

Chapter 2: Vision of Yogic Education

Swami Satyananda defines the nature of (Bihar) yoga in its full range in contra-distinction to the partial understanding prevalent among yoga teachers in 1967. He stresses that the purpose of yoga is “the unfoldment of the hidden potentialities of the human being.” Further on, he says that “the ideal to aim for is to bring out the *satyam, shivam, sundaram* – truth, consciousness and beauty – all that is best in humankind.” Swami Satyananda explicitly states that “we want to create a gurukul type of educational institution wherein the ancient and the modern ideas of education will blend in happy harmony, where the young ones will receive education from saints and mahatmas.” Indeed, this has become a reality in Rikhia, as will become evident from the chapters on the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia.

Chapter 3: A Gurukul System of Education

In this chapter Swami Niranjanananda explains some aspects of the gurukul system of education and indicates the way this system is viewed from the standpoint of Bihar Yoga. He also explains how the SWAN principle can be of use in guiding and focusing the practices of self-study, *swadhyaya*. Most importantly, he points out that the effective realization of the gurukul system of education depends crucially on its appropriate adaptation to the social and cultural environment in which it is to be implemented. He goes on to say that in India the system has been implemented successfully in two forms, corresponding respectively to a rural environment in Rikhia and an urban environment in Munger. These two models are discussed in detail in corresponding chapters of Part III on Youth Empowerment. These chapters have been

written by founding participants in one of the two forms of the gurukul system of education, either as teachers, students or both in the case of the children.

Chapter 4: Establishing the Gurukul System of Education at Rikhiapeeth

In this chapter, Swami Satyasangananda, who has implemented the gurukul system of education in Rikhia since 1989, under the watchful guidance of her guru Swami Satyananda, gives a delightful personal account of the establishment of, not only the Rikhia ashram, but how the work for the kanyas and batuks came to fruition. The children who are involved in this project are not only receiving an education, but have had their lives totally changed in every way possible. The empowerment that has happened to these children has given them not only the chance to advance in life, but also to dream of a future filled with new hope and experiences.

Chapter 5: Balanced Education

This chapter by Swami Satyananda, written twenty-seven years after Chapter 2 of this volume, also by Swami Satyananda, stresses that children must be allowed to be mischievous to avoid behavioural problems later, and states that an ashram affords a better place for them to be mischievous than a crowded home. He also suggests that the levels of consciousness of the children and parents are very different, whereas that of the children and those in the ashram are more alike. In the process of emphasizing the gurukul process, he strives throughout to give parents a deeper understanding of this difference as a way to bridge this difference in a beneficial way. This should prompt contributors for any future volume of this book of the need for addressing parents as they write, since the parents must understand and be convinced of the benefits of what the authors are proposing as an integration of appropriate yoga techniques in the educational processes.

Chapter 6: Yoga and Education

In this chapter, Swami Niranjanananda distinguishes between yoga, as an aid in conventional education, and what he calls 'yogic education' or 'self-education.' This latter process takes place before the age of seven and consists of instilling the right *samskaras* (fundamental impressions) in the child, which is mainly the responsibility of the mother. To facilitate this process, Swamiji uses the so-called SWAN principle to analyze the nature and relationships between the Strengths, Weaknesses, Ambitions and Needs, first of the mother and then of the child. This analysis has to be the initial basis of yogic education.

The second stage of yogic education is the extension of the awareness of the children into their external environment and to their interaction with that environment on a personal, familial and social level. This process can be characterized as a form of *pratyahara*. The third stage of yogic education involves recognizing and accepting themselves as they are, which can be aided by the previous analysis of the child using the SWAN principle. Of course the children must be guided by their mothers in this process, but it already involves a form of *dhyana* (meditation in the sense of self-awareness) on the part of the children. To make his meaning clear, Swami Niranjanananda defines three kinds of *dharana*. Next, after summarizing his concept of yogic education, he relates this notion to some of the standard practices incorporated in Bihar Yoga, such as *antar mouna*, *ajapa japa*, etc. In this way, Swami Niranjanananda briefly indicates the role of the educator, especially the mother, in shaping the consciousness of the child in the formative years.

Chapter 7: Enhancing the Ability to Study

Swami Niranjanananda addresses the youth (aged fourteen to seventeen years) in his chapter on enhancing the ability to study, utilizing classical techniques of yoga. He does so in the self-empowering manner which has been the characteristic of all his interaction with children in the schools he visits

and it is particularly evident in his gentle nurturing of the efforts of the children which has given rise to the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, numbering 121,000 members, aged eight to fourteen years, in 2008.

Thus we see, from the development of the ideas in this first part of the book, that they have yielded very concrete fruits in society through the medium of youth empowerment resulting from the integration of yoga in the daily lives of children, which is further enhanced by daily access to a gurukul environment.

Chapter 8: Questions and Answers about Yoga for Children

In this chapter, many of the points raised in the previous chapters of this section are further elucidated in the form of questions and answers. Furthermore, the special nature of the consciousness of children is discussed at length; the role of mantra in altering existing mental and emotional patterns; and the need for parents to work on themselves is re-emphasized, since children tend to learn mostly by imitating adults.

Mandala

The transition from Part I to Part II is accomplished by a lovely poem by a special needs student concerning a mandala she coloured as part of a study to use mandalas as a diagnostic tool.

PART II: SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Chapter 9: Yoga in Special Needs Education: What's So Special about It?

This chapter, by Dr Swami Chandrajyoti Saraswati, presents three meanings for the term 'special' in the context of Special Needs Education: as a transformative nucleus of society, as a storehouse of transformative tools and as an integrative capacity on individual and global levels. This article takes cognizance of discussions at a number of conferences sponsored by UNESCO and indicates the important role of

yoga as a vast storehouse of transformative tools, in line with the current view on pedagogies in this area.

Chapter 10: A Class for Special Needs Children

The author presents experiences gleaned from teaching yoga to a wide variety of special needs children in a number of institutions, and characterizes specific yoga techniques which were found to be effective in this context, indicating in which specific ways they affected the children.

Chapter 11: Yoga Nidra for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children

This chapter is an account of experiences had while teaching yoga to deaf and hearing impaired children. It demonstrates a carefully reasoned approach to the problem, and abounds in unique adaptations to conventional yoga techniques, applied with intelligence and compassion. It also gives many details about beneficial effects observed. This could be a foundational paper for a systematic model and approach to making yoga available to impaired children.

Chapter 12: Getting in Touch, with Adya

This chapter deals with the problems of autistic children and is an account of experiences with an autistic child named Adya, aged twelve years, in one-on-one sessions of yoga practice. The author gives a brief, but essential characterization of autism, as well as of the background of the child, to put the reader in the picture. Yoga was introduced, utilizing appropriate techniques, to combat specific physical problems of the child, and continued for a year. Marked improvements in the overall wellbeing of the child were noted and there was even a cancellation of scheduled lung surgery, due to improvements in the child's respiratory system as a result of the yoga program given. The author gives detailed observations based on a systematic record of Adya's daily yoga practice and variations in her condition that were closely monitored by the girl's mother. These should prove of great interest for

any yoga teacher aiming to help autistic children in a decisive and lasting manner.

PART III: YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Chapter 13: Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, Munger: Yoga Education by Children

This chapter is a very informative account of the history of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the first organization conceived, created and organized by children themselves for children. Each perceived difficulty was always solved by the children in such a way so as to achieve what they wanted their organization to be with admirable effectiveness. The purpose of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is to empower children to teach yoga to children in schools. Not only have these children given excellent yoga presentations in the context of large numbers of participants in their community – five to ten thousand participants – but they also successfully took full responsibility for the security and coordination of the events. Swami Niranjanananda gave gentle and experienced guidance at crucial points along the way, but it is evident from the words of the author, Vikas Kumar, the initiating youth of the movement, that the foundation of the movement and major decisions were always the children's own. The degree of youth empowerment exemplified by Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is unsurpassed by any such endeavour worldwide, and it is moving from strength to strength every year since its inception. Those graduating from this organization move into Bal Yuva Mitra Mandal (ages ten to fourteen years) and subsequently Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal (ages fourteen to twenty-nine).

Why Yoga Education by Children?

Here we find a statement of appreciation in the concept of yoga education by children, by one of the members of the first group of children to initiate the model forming the basis of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal.

Chapter 14: Yoga for Children by Children: An Empirical Study with the Bihar Yoga System

This chapter is an empirical study of the effects of yoga practice on the development of the personalities and cognitive abilities of children, conducted by Vikas Kumar within the context of the first four years of the formation of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. The chapter gives a short account of the results of the study, which are self-explanatory, and closes with some precise data about the growth and status of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal as of August 2002.

Chapter 15: The Kanyas and Batuks of Rikhia

This chapter gives an account of the development called ‘The Kanyas and Batuks of Rikhia’, which parallels the development of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal of Munger. The kanyas and batuks are village children. Many come from extremely impoverished backgrounds. Their needs are vastly different to the children of Munger. In Munger, the activity of the children began within the school system and the wider community they shared in a city environment. In Rikhia, the activity was initiated by Swami Satyananda Saraswati by selecting at least one eligible child from every family and from every village in the rural setting of the Rikhia panchayat. They now number over 1,500 children between the ages of six to twelve years. Swami Satyananda envisioned this group, which is receiving education and aid in its broadest sense, to form a nucleus for the upliftment of the entire community in the Rikhia panchayat in the years to come. These children have become an integral part of all activities in programs conducted at the Rikhia ashram of Swami Satyananda. A large part of their daily presence in the ashram is devoted to their education, which ranges from English to computer literacy, but also involves the learning of Sanskrit, as well as reading and later memorizing classical texts, such as *Bhagavad Gita*, *Durga Saptashati*, etc., as well as conducting important ceremonies, accompanied by the appropriate actions and chanting of the mantras involved.

This has enabled them to increasingly play a highly praised role as hosts and participants in all activities and programs at Rikhiapeeth.

Of course, they also have a significant effect on the community outside the ashram, but their primary activities beautifully enhance the atmosphere of the ashram. Through them, the experiences of ashram residents and all visitors to the ashram are enriched beyond measure. This impression clearly emerges from the account given in this chapter.

The activities of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal are evident in the community at city, state and national levels. They are also increasingly involved in programs within the ashram.

These two highly successful experiments in youth empowerment are influencing each other in a symbiotic way, benefiting from successes achieved, relative to differing environments and the social needs.

Experiences as a Kanya

Here, Sinu Kumari gives an interesting account of her experiences as a Rikhia kanya from 1998 to 2007. She emphasizes her appreciation of learning English and having access to books, which immediately opened her horizons of possible paths to modern and higher education. Half of her account focuses on the thorough grounding received at the ashram, concerning a true understanding of the Sanskrit spiritual tradition of India, often surpassing the pandits in their chanting of slokas or even the performance of the whole of a complex yajna. The modern and extrovert intellect is seen nicely balanced by the introvert spirit, and both are grounded by an open heart.

Chapter 16: Yuva Yoga: Youth Empowerment

This chapter, by Rishi Arundhati Saraswati, discusses the requirements for teenagers, which means the children who have evolved out of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and now find themselves in Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal. The actual

activities of this youth group are as yet to be delineated in a future volume.

PART IV: TECHNIQUES

The book *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One*, included some preliminary suggestions of yoga techniques for pre-school children, seven to fourteen years old, and some techniques for inclusion in the classroom. But the major part involves an adaptation of traditional techniques, as found in the text *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, to be applicable to children, as the result of fifteen years of experience with teaching yoga to children by Rishi Arundhati Saraswati.

In this second volume, these adapted yoga techniques are reused and further adapted to enable them to be used within a wide variety of contexts: games, art sessions, etc., thus reinforcing learning, influencing negative and positive behaviours of children, stimulating imagination, as well as visualization and other aspects of the yoga of mediation and, most of all, introducing fun into the whole process of yoga for children.

Chapter 17: Yoga Games

This chapter introduces ten games that have been used with great success, both from the viewpoint of the children and that of the teachers involved. The design of the games is clearly given, together with many reasons that justify the design, based on sound, physiological and psychological concepts, as well as those of the arts. The experiences with the games over a period of ten or more years are given throughout.

Chapter 18: Row Your Boat: A Class Idea

This chapter uses the idea of 'Row Your Boat' to introduce the children to the awareness of correct posture, awareness of the process of correct breathing, development of the inner senses and cooperative group activity.

Chapter 19: Yoga Classes as Stories

The authors point out that stories can be used in teaching yoga to children, to teach sequences of asanas and pranayamas and to allow for easy recall by the children. However, stories can also be used to teach appropriate behaviour, as expressed in the yamas and niyamas of Patanjali Yoga, in a non-threatening and playful way. Both these approaches to the use of games to familiarize children with the different aspects of yoga are explained, and a number of example stories are given in the chapter.

Chapter 20: The Art of Yoga

This chapter is quite unique in yogic literature as it is concerned with teaching yoga along with principles of Fine Art, such as drawing and painting. It is based on the personal experiences of the author, of the benefits of yoga in her own development as an artist, and on ideas from *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One*, for introducing yoga for the early development of children. The chapter presents yoga practices found useful in facilitating and reinforcing the acquisition of the skills for drawing and painting. Three detailed art projects are described, giving clear objectives, materials needed and procedures to follow. In particular, the author gives a yoga section for each project, which clearly indicates yoga practices which can be used to stimulate the children's sensitivities and expressive powers. The author also explicitly acknowledges her indebtedness to the notion of the Yoga Magic Carpet Ride, presented in the next chapter, in the choice and development of themes for the art projects.

Chapter 21: Yoga Magic Carpet Rides™

The concept of the Yoga Magic Carpet Ride was developed by Rishi Arundhati to embed yogic practices within a framework for teaching children a greater appreciation of other cultures, as well as transmitting information about geography, history, etc., in a playful manner. The usual benefits of the yoga practices can be obtained in this way,

and the children readily learn the sequences built into any specific Yoga Magic Carpet Ride. Hence, one could also construct specific sequences of asanas etc., for children to practise for their specific problems, and embed them in appropriate stories for easy remembering, as well as making the whole process fun.

The first section of the chapter presents a magic carpet ride to Egypt with detailed instructions for its performance. The Magic Carpet Ride has been put into book style with illustrations by a twelve-year-old. The first part of the second section presents a ride to the North Pole and the second part involves a ride to the Antarctic. Both rides are rendered by the same young artist.

Chapter 22: Pratyahara and Dharana: Relaxation and Concentration

In this chapter, Rishi Arundhati discusses *pratyahara* and *dharana*, relaxation and concentration, as two techniques that can be taught to children in appropriate ways. Specific techniques which have proved effective are *yoga nidra* – yogic relaxation, *trataka* – fixed gazing, *nada yoga* – learning to listen, *chidakasha dharana* – looking at the internal space, as well as kirtan and mantra chanting. The theme for looking at the internal space is the ‘Magician’s Tower’, which takes the children through the classical system of the chakras in a magical and fun way, suited to the sensibilities of children.

Chapter 23: Yoga Nidra and Other Meditations for Children

This is a very extensive, carefully thought out and experience-based presentation of forms of yoga nidra and other meditations suitable for children. It abounds in detailed and specific instructions to conduct many styles of such practice, giving solid reasons for their design.

Chapter 24: Asana and Pranayama

Here we find a classical presentation of the need for asana and pranayama, with special emphasis on their use in the

context of the various frameworks such as games, art, etc. Every classical asana and every modification of the asana, adapting it to a given framework discussed in the book, can be found in this detailed asana section. This makes the book self-contained for the reader.

Editor

Rishi Vasishthananda Saraswati

November 30 2008

Yoga Education for Children

Volume Two

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Yoga Education for Children

Volume Two

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Editor's Note

(From Canadian edition)

Dedicated to our gurus, Paramguru Swami Sivananda, Guru Satyananda Paramahansa and Guru Niranjanananda Paramahansa, who have started a movement of revival in India through children. The large number of children teaching yoga is laying a foundation for a different culture. Yoga is the culture of tomorrow.

The inspiration

Swami Sivananda was the wellspring that touched many, who in turn have collectively brought about a yoga revolution world wide. He is the innovator of a true yoga renaissance.

The prime motivator

Swami Satyananda Saraswati, also known as Paramahansa Satyananda, one of the many disciples of Swami Sivananda, has achieved and set the example of how a sannyasin can remain detached yet be so completely involved in enriching the lives of those around him spiritually, culturally, and physically.

The prime mover

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, also known as Paramahansa Niranjanananda, chief disciple and successor to Sri Swamiji, is an inspiration to all with his wide exposure and especially to the children and youth with his playfulness. While bringing to fruition the ideas of his guru and paramguru, Swamiji seems to be in many places at one time. He moves between Munger, Rikhia and the rest of the world like a butterfly that brings beauty, grace and joy to whatever and wherever he touches.

The foundation of guru's vision

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati (Satsangi) has become

a mother to thousands of children, and through her guidance an ever growing number of children's lives are being touched by this contact with her and others in the ashram environment. Adding all this young energy to the ashram environment has been a spectacular achievement. She is a true inspiration to the women and girls of the area.

Compiler and contributor

Rishi Arundhati Saraswati (Janie Lee Lauer), BA (Psych), Univ. of Newcastle on Tyne, UK, specialist in infant and child development and cognitive development, has been teaching Bihar (Satyananda) Yoga since 1968. She produced the first volume of *Yoga Education for Children* in 1985, and is the founder of Y.E.S., the Association for Yoga Education in Schools. She was born in 1937 in Tennessee, USA, and there met Rishi Vasishthananda and was introduced to yoga.

Editor

Rishi Vasishthananda Saraswati (Dr Peter Ernst Lauer), BA (Phil), Univ. of Alabama, MA (Phil), Emory University, Georgia, and PhD (Computer Science), Queen's University, Belfast, has been teaching meditation and yoga philosophy in the Bihar (Satyananda) Yoga tradition since 1968. He has also been a pioneer in the development and teaching of computer science in Europe and North America. He was born in 1934 in Teplitz Schoenau, Czechoslovakia.

Both Rishis Arundhati and Vasishthananda have been associated with Swami Satyananda Saraswati since 1968,



and have co-founded and served as acharyas of Satyananda ashrams and yoga centres in Northern Ireland (1969), Austria (1970), England (1975–84) and Canada (1984 to present). They both received manasi sannyasa diksha in 1968 and rishi sannyasa in 2006.

Contributors

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Keisha Quinn, born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, illustrated the Magic Carpet Rides at the age of twelve. She is already a budding yogi and spends much of her time, when not at school, working to save the environment.

Maria Capurro is an artist and nursery school teacher in Montevideo, Uruguay. She uses yoga techniques designed by R.Y.E. (Research on Yoga in Education) and herself for instilling intellectual creativity and ethical behaviours in the children in her care.

Association for Yoga Education in Schools (Y.E.S.)

A charitable and educational association founded by Rishis Vasishthananda and Arundhati Saraswati in Canada and USA in 1990. Paramahansa Niranjanananda is the patron of Y.E.S.

Y.E.S. is an instrument for bringing about an increase in awareness of the positive effects of yogic discipline in the school and at home. The aims of Y.E.S. are:

- to inform school teachers of the tools offered by yoga for developing the body, mind and emotions of those children in their care.
- to promote a thorough understanding of cognitive and physical development in children and youths by yoga teachers of children, parents and caregivers.
- to provide the opportunity for youth empowerment by training children and youths to become yoga instructors.
- to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas on yoga for children.
- to provide ideas on how the goals of Y.E.S. can be achieved.

Education

1

The Purpose of Education

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Education is the root. Culture is the flower. Wisdom is the fruit.

Every student should reflect calmly and carefully and understand first what is the true meaning and purpose of education. Without an understanding of this, the blind pursuit of a diploma or a degree becomes a dry mockery, ending inevitably in disillusionment.

Education is not the amassing of information and its purpose is not mere career hunting. It is a means of developing a fully integrated personality and enabling one to grow effectively into the likeness of the ideal that one has set before oneself. Student life is a precious period of inner culture, a period concerned with the very important task of laying the foundation of one's character and personality. Upon this alone depends the making or marring of one's future life.

There is a need to first strive to develop selective discrimination of what is true, pure, noble, worthy, abiding and great, and detect that which is unworthy, impure and ignoble. Side by side, students can also develop an intense aspiration for the abiding and worthy values of life, and a strong determination to stick to them and reject the petty and the mundane without hesitation.

Whether the schools and colleges help young people to do this or not, students themselves can strive in all earnestness

to mould themselves on the right lines, under the inspiration of great works and the lives of eminent personalities. Then their lives will be blessed.

Education as an initiation into life

Remember that education is not merely teaching some means of earning a livelihood, some tenets of citizenship, etc., but also developing spirituality and morality. True education imparts an initiation into a life of noble aspiration and sacred values. It should be remembered that all studies are intended for the enlightenment of the mind and the illumination of the soul; they are not meant for vainglory.

Education is to prepare a person to face life with courage and fortitude. It should eradicate the gross nature and animal instincts and transform one into a pure, noble soul. Education is to concern itself with all the varied aspects of life. The sense of duty, of responsibility as an individual, as a member of the family and society, and as a citizen of a nation needs to be nurtured within the student. For only then can one obtain a broad outlook, a capacity for balanced judgement and a keen intellect.

The aim of education is to lift you above the narrow grooves of bigotry, crookedness, hypocrisy, fanaticism and selfishness. A bigoted man is quite uneducated. A fanatical man has no education. Superstition is not education. The highest education is that which inculcates pure love, courage, and a sense of duty, balance of mind, devotion, faith, discrimination, tolerance, dispassion and knowledge of the Self.

Gurukul culture: living and learning with the guru

There is a wide gulf when comparing the present education system with the ancient gurukul system. When students finished their course of study, the rishis would give further instructions: “Speak the truth. Do your duty. Do not swerve from the truth. Maintain your welfare and prosperity. Uphold the learning and teachings of the Vedas. May the mother be

your God. May the father be your God. Only perform actions which are blameless. Focus on performing good works and nothing else.”

Every student in the gurukul had a knowledge of pranayama, mantra, yogasana, the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the Upanishads. Every student possessed the qualities of humility, self-restraint, obedience, spirit of service and self-sacrifice, a courteous nature and last but not least a desire for acquiring *atmajnana* (knowledge of the Self). This was the predominant feature of the ancient culture.

Developing spiritual awareness

Education should always aim at the development of a spiritual attitude towards life. Spirituality does not hinder material progress. In fact it buttresses material interests. The real advancement and wellbeing of every society and nation depends upon the right kind of educational basis.

If an education system is to be morally effective, it must rest on a spiritual foundation. Only if this is assured will science effectively serve the interests of mankind. A lopsided emphasis, either on humanities or science alone, will not serve the interests of the country. Science is not Godless. But science and technology alone cannot ensure perfect peace and harmony. Humanities alone cannot cure the ills of poverty or safeguard the freedom of the country. There should be a synthetic development of both.

Art of living

Education is training in the art of living. It is a process of drawing out all the positive potentialities latent in the student in order to refine and elevate the mind. Man is said to be a thinking animal. This thinking process should be helped by education to discipline the animal instincts. The right sense of values on which to build one's life should be revealed through education.

The function of education is to assist the evolution of mankind, which is movement towards perfection. The integral

growth of one's personality and the task of developing natural capacities, faculties and talents should all be supported by the education that is received. Life is to be lived worthily for a noble purpose in a rational and correct manner. Education plays an important role in developing one's conscience to become the guide in life.

Students are the builders of the nation of tomorrow. The life of a student is a preparation for shouldering the great responsibilities of the future. Let the students understand this well and discipline themselves first. Let the voice of the schools and colleges be one of sympathy, service, discipline, love, culture and fellowship, where all the teachers and professors prove their worth. The regeneration of the individual and the young generation means betterment of the whole nation.

Importance of early education

The education of a child begins from within the mother's womb, and then from the moment the child sees the light of day the lifelong process accelerates. Although a child is likely to be influenced by good and bad contacts throughout adolescence and adulthood, whatever habits of thought, action and feeling are formed during those early days last throughout life. The virtuous nature of the personality is sown during childhood.

The most important step in obtaining the excellence of which such a tender nature is capable is in beginning the growth of a child in the right manner. The first notions of the world are learnt from being around the mother, from the immediate surroundings and from playmates. The surroundings provide an efficient means for education and good instruction of the young. Here the essential training is to arouse the keen, fresh perception to observe rightly, to record correctly, to infer justly and to gently express oneself. From the very early school days, under the guidance of good teachers, it is necessary to encourage a child to develop the habit of grouping, classifying and deducing things for oneself.

When the health of children is neglected there is little chance of them developing a high quality of intelligence and character, let alone physique. The physical training of a child is a matter of great importance. A strong, pure, healthy body is necessary for the full expression of the developing soul within. Therefore, the diet of a child needs to be wholesome and nourishing without overburdening the digestive system.

Teachers, parents and adults all need to give a child a good measure of freedom. They are to provide the best material that will enable the young to feel and experience their still forming aptitudes and faculties. Teaching by example, rather than by a command which one is unable to practise oneself, is the strongest mode of instruction.

A child must never be ridiculed. As an adult, one must try to understand the nature of the child. Kindness, affection and love are far more effective in training children than threats and punishment.

Ultimately, the aim of real education is drawing out the dormant divinity lying hidden within each human being. Spiritual enlightenment is the fruit of the real, inner education.

2

Vision of Yogic Education

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Saints have taken birth to uphold the culture of the nation; this has been our tradition for countless ages. But now there is friction between nation and nation. There is turmoil in the mind of man; his outer and inner life are at war with each other and there is no harmony. In India, my own country, there is chaos and a sense of frustration. It looks as if the ancient tradition of saintly souls keeping alive all that is good in our culture is no longer there.

How are we going to re-establish this ancient culture of ours? Politicians cannot revive it, nor can economists or reformers, for all of them fail to fulfil the one essential condition for its operation. You cannot reform others unless you reform yourself first. You cannot purify others unless you purify yourself first. Only saints can fulfil this condition. In the surrounding darkness, they bring the bright flame of yoga as their answer for the ills of the modern world, and now the time is ripe for an advent of a new psychic age.

Man runs vainly after the good things of life which are impermanent. Instead he should go in search of that which is not perishable, that which is immortal. As long as mankind runs after ephemeral things, there can be no salvation either for the individual, or for society, or for the world. The more we turn towards things spiritual, the more we evolve. That is why in Indian culture, saints who are spiritually advanced souls are held in high esteem.

In our daily doings we waste a great deal of energy. Yoga helps to stop this waste of energy by making us go within, and when we at last turn inward, all the *samskaras* – the misdoings of countless previous births – dissolve. Our concept of yoga is different from the generally accepted one. Asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, etc., are all different limbs of yoga, but they are only a means to an end, the end being the unfoldment of the hidden potentialities of a human being.

For us, the ideal to aim for is to bring out the *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram* – truth, consciousness and beauty – all that is best in humankind. We believe that everyone can practise yoga, irrespective of where they are and what they are. We do not believe that world-shunning renunciates are the only ones who can profit from yoga. We are therefore out to propagate yoga worldwide. We tell both young and old to make their life fully yoga-oriented.

Blending the ancient and modern ideas of education in the gurukul

With this in mind, and inspired by our guru Swami Sivananda, we want to create a gurukul-type of educational institution wherein the ancient and modern ideas of education will blend in happy harmony, where the young ones will receive education from saints and *mahatmas*, higher souls. What is education for if not to create universal brotherhood and a united world? That is the end of all education. Is education meant only for degrees or to earn a livelihood? We would rather educate the students to bring out all their unawakened potentialities and their dormant powers.

Education is not just for earning our daily bread, not for degrees and diplomas, but to create a unified world. Everything we learn in schools and elsewhere should bring us nearer to the point of world unity, where all the differences dissolve and merge into unity. Christians are not primarily Christians, Hindus are not primarily Hindus, Muslims are not primarily Moslems, but we are first of all *atmans*, sparks of the one divine soul, and this should be realized.

This is the message of Vedanta; there is one *atman*, one essence, one consciousness, one reality penetrating and permeating everyone. That should be the background of education, and because Vedanta teaches us this universal brotherhood, there should be at least one vedantic textbook in all our educational institutions. Vedanta is a science and not just metaphysics; it trains your psyche to see and feel the unity which runs like a thread through the universe.

You may adopt different labels and create different religions but the essence of religion does not change. Religion begins with people and survives after they have gone. You cannot destroy religion. So what we must strive to do is to remove the differences between religions and only then will there be universal kinship. Political, racial, ideological and religious differences must all go. For this we have to take full advantage of our educational institutions, and arrange our program of education so that a day will soon dawn when the slogan of 'one world' becomes a reality.

This vedantic vision should be developed through the teaching of yoga. Our school textbooks should be written by those who have knowledge of human psychology. They should be written by seers who can envisage the shape of things to come, thirty or forty years hence. The present system of exerting influence to acquire a monopoly of producing textbooks must go. Also, yogic techniques of meditation should be introduced in the educational institutions to remove the subconscious samskaras of our students and to bring out the best in the human personality.

We shall consecrate ourselves to this aim, not only in thoughts, not only in words, not merely with our material possessions, but without any reservations whatsoever. It is a grand idea. What happens when we become the instrument of the Lord? When the dew drop slips into the sea, a great miracle takes place, the miracle of the sea entering the dew drop.

We shall overcome our limitations and shortcomings. We shall get over the difficulties that face us today. And when

this happens, we shall have peace; a peace that passes all understanding, not the peace as we understand it, but the peace of *nirvana*, the peace of final emancipation, the peace of *jivanmukta*, enlightenment in life. Too long have we lived a life of *ajnana*, ignorance. Now let us resolve to remove that *ajnana*. We are all the children of God. Just as an infant learning to walk moves forward, step by step, towards the outstretched hands of his parent, so too shall we move forward step by step and in complete surrender. We shall not allow any problems, great or small, to stand in our way.

Nothing external can help us, for the unfoldment is within, not without. All the treasures and riches of the world are within. The name of the Lord is the greatest gift you can have. Try to keep your mind in tune with the name. Keep yourself firmly anchored to it; it is the highest *sadhana*, or practice, beyond the comprehension of the human mind. In the scholastic sense, the name is a mere component of a few syllables, but in reality the intellect fails to understand the wonder working power of the name. It takes away all our *avidya*, gross ignorance. This is the experience of our saints through the centuries. It was for this reason that Swami Sivananda used to say that chanting God's name is the highest *sadhana*.

3

A Gurukul System of Education

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

In an ashram the tradition of the *gurukul*, the teacher's family, is where there is an environment and a lifestyle conducive to spiritual growth; where the vision and spirit of the masters of a tradition is kept alive. It is an environment which is spiritual and where the vision of the guru can unfold. The gurukul at Ganga Darshan, Munger, represents a tradition of visionaries: Swami Sivananda, who foresaw the need of yoga as a lifestyle for the future and Swami Satyananda, who structured the vision of his guru, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle into a very practical and scientific system called Bihar Yoga or Satyananda Yoga. It is through this system of yoga that Swami Satyananda (Sri Swamiji) developed the techniques through which we can harmonize and improve the efficiency of our head, heart and hands – intellect, emotions and actions.

Developing the whole personality

Yoga in the gurukul system involves integration and development of the entire human personality, not only the body or mind. In the gurukul system of education there has to be a balance between *asanas*, or physical postures, *pranayama*, breath control, *pratyahara*, relaxation, and *dharana*, concentration. Also one is given the task of experimenting with the *yamas*, or abstentions and *niyamas*, observances, to experience those attitudes and perceptions and their role in

one's life. Adherence to yamas and niyamas leads to an inner transformation. It helps you to connect with your own inner qualities and strengths. So the totality of raja yoga is lived by the student.

Synthesis of yogic experience

Swadhyaya, or self-study, one of the observances, is also part of the gurukul system of education and is a part of jnana yoga. Bhakti yoga in the system gives one the chance to be exposed to different tools to channel, transcend and sublimate the gross emotions. Of course, the karma yoga experience of performing *seva*, selfless actions, is an important part of the ashram routine. The gurukul environment and the ashram lifestyle help one to experience yoga as it is meant to be experienced, to have a different understanding of yoga and a different understanding of life.

The mature mind

Yoga is a continuous process of development and cannot be learnt in a couple of years, but once you have practised, studied and understood yoga, you will find that your daily moments become filled with yogic awareness. Yoga is not only asana and pranayama, it is an attitude, an awareness of your interaction with life and the ability to ensure smooth passage through moments of difficulty. So, yoga is an ongoing process of education.

Education is not just an intellectual process or achievement. Rather, education plays a very vital part in the maturing of the human mind and consciousness. Maturity of mind and consciousness is the aim of education and is reflected in the ability to apply in practice the knowledge that you have gained intellectually. Knowledge is one thing and application is another. Knowledge without application is merely an intellectual achievement, but when you begin to apply what you know, then the process of maturity of consciousness begins. When you are able to maintain your balance, harmony and peace in day-to-day situations, that is maturity of mind.

Where real education begins

The growth of an individual begins with positive interaction between the parent and the child. It is this period which is crucial and important for education. Today's society inspires violence; the toys we give our children are guns and water pistols. Psychologically, we are telling them "Express your violence!" We are giving them the message that the only emotion to express is their anger and violence. If that is the state of our interaction with our children, then in the future we are going to see a lot of social disturbances and psychological imbalances, and society does not have any infrastructure to deal with such situations. It is happening even now with the rise in crime and decline in values.

Our concept of education has to change from classroom education to personal education. This shift has to be made. How do we do that? According to the yogic theories, real education, intuitive education and humanitarian education stops around the age of seven and after that academic education begins. People like Micheline Flak and other thinkers are concerned with the academic school education after the age of seven, but we are concerned with the intuitive education which a child can imbibe only up to the age of seven. This education is imbibed through the family environment, the culture, the society, and it is known as *samskara*, the programming of the human computer. The mother is responsible for such education, but remember that if a seed is rotten, whatever grows from it will also be infirm, weak and rotten. We cannot provide our offspring with the right *samskaras*. Therefore, it is my request to all the mothers and mothers-to-be to make a conscious effort to gain *samskaras* in their nature, personality and life, to express these *samskaras* in the family environment, and to educate the children with those *samskaras*.

The SWAN principle

It is in this context that I would discuss *samskaras*, intellect and intelligence. What are *samskaras*? We have said they are

impressions. Intellect and intelligence are two different things. Intelligence is a natural expression of what you know, of what you live for, and intellect is our imbibed concepts. Intelligence is a harmonious expression of our beliefs and our nature. I can be an intellectual giant but not have intelligence. I can have intelligence and yet be an absolutely ignorant fool. Therefore, we have to learn to differentiate between intellect and intelligence. Intellect deals with *buddhi*, the process of knowing, and intelligence deals with *bodha*, the process of expression.

These things have to be understood in relation to human nature. There is a theory which I call the 'SWAN' principle, S-W-A-N, which are acronyms for strength, weakness, ambition and need. These are the four traits inherent in a human personality. We all have our strengths, we all have our weaknesses, we all have our ambitions and we all have our needs. We have to realize what our particular SWAN principle is. What is my strength, what is my weakness, what is my ambition and what is my need? Here the question is being put to parents. We have to be very careful that we do not confuse our need with ambition, our ambition with our strength, and our weakness with our need. There has to be a clear division in the recognition of personal strength, weakness, ambition and need. Once you are able to do that, you should also be able to observe the personality of the being with whom you live, whether that person is your husband, or your wife, or your child, or anyone.

In this way, when you actually begin to realize the principles that govern your personality you will find that your attitudes and perceptions change. These changes are the beginning of education in yoga. If teachers can recognize the strength and weakness of the child, they can be better teachers; they can encourage and support growth and development. If parents can recognize the strengths of the child, they can encourage these strengths. If they can recognize the weakness of the child, they can help overcome that weakness. If they can recognize the ambitions of the child, they can guide the child

so that the ambitions are fulfilled in a positive, constructive way. If they can recognize the needs of the child, they can help the child fulfil those needs. In this way, the process of providing the right *samskara*, the right impression, the right programming begins. So, the first stage is the recognition of the SWAN principle in each and every individual.

Application of SWAN principle and simple yoga techniques in schools

Today's needs and today's possibilities do not permit a universal implementation of the gurukul system of education worldwide. However, an understanding of the SWAN principle and other simple yoga techniques can be taught. School children can be taught certain mantras for fine-tuning listening skills and for the positive effect of the sound vibrations on the brain. They can learn some yoga postures – steady poses, not gymnastics – that bring about important physiological effects, such as balancing hormonal development, developing the nervous system and stimulating the digestive system. Breathing techniques can be introduced. They are an excellent way to control runaway emotions such as hysterical laughter and excessive anger. Such a program would benefit both adults and children.

Instead of just asking the students to study this, memorize this before next week, why not give them practices that develop concentration and careful listening habits. All these practices that are found in the gurukul system of education can easily be implemented in the regular school system to the great benefit of the students. However, the most important element of the gurukul system of education is the headmaster, who is himself a great spiritual individual, whose concern is peace for the whole of humanity.

In India we are beginning to re-establish the gurukul system of education in two forms: one with the children in Rikhia, where Swami Satyananda lived and did *sadhana*, and the second is in Munger with adults where I live.

4

Establishing the Gurukul System of Education at Rikhiapeeth

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

When I arrived with Swami Satyananda at Rikhia, an obscure village in Jharkhand, I felt as if I was slipping back into the 16th century. You could not get more backward than that; there was simply no trace of the 21st century, no roads, no electricity, no phones, no newspapers, no cars, no busy streets, no hospitals, a few dilapidated schools looking desolate with only a few ragged unkempt children, wearing torn and tattered clothing.

That was the Rikhia we entered on 21st September 1989. Swami Satyananda had chosen this place for his life of seclusion according to a mandate he had received while performing austerities at the jyotir linga of Shiva at Trayambakeshwar near Mumbai. Soon after he arrived, Sri Swamiji plunged into sadhana and undertook the sankalpa of performing many arduous practices such as panchagni and mantra anusthana.

It was during this time that our neighbours began knocking on our door for help. They were hungry, they needed medicines, shelter and clothing. The very basics that we take so much for granted were unavailable to them. We started helping them in whatever way we could and help started pouring in. Our work began in full swing when, in 1995, Swami Satyananda, accepting that as the will of God, gave us the green signal to start this work in earnest in an organized and systematic manner, with the attitude of an *aradhana*, or worship of God in living form.

Today, when you see the same place and the people, especially the children, you may not believe the condition they were in hardly ten years ago. They would qualify perfectly for a before and after advertisement if you know what I mean!

How did it all happen? The very same children, who at that time did not have the confidence to look you in the eye and answer a simple question like what is your name, today are at the helm of the Rikhia ashram, speaking wonderful English, designing the ashram calendars, conducting all its multifarious programs, singing soul stirring kirtans, conducting yajnas with perfect intonation of Sanskrit mantras which would make even a pandit sit up and listen.

When I look back to the time when a young village girl knocked on our door and shyly asked to learn English and we hesitantly started to teach her 'abc', I am amazed to see how the small seed sown on that day has flourished into this giant tree of over 1,500 children that are ever on the increase.

Mind you, these children come from impoverished homes. They are the unfortunate, neglected of society who have been condemned to a life worse than the animals that affluent members of society rear as pets in their homes. They do not have even the basic amenities that a child needs like a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, comb and towel or even a toilet where they can bathe in privacy. This, to my mind, is the main achievement of Rikhia because these children have literally risen out of the doldrums.

Rikhia was an experiment, based on the philosophy of Swami Satyananda, that education is a process of unfoldment from within, not something you borrow from outside, which becomes possible when the child is exposed to a positive environment and receives trust, encouragement, recognition, responsibility and love, as in a gurukul system of education.

Sri Swamiji always says that when you contribute to the growth of an otherwise useless person and make him capable, that is a big achievement and accomplishment. Anyone can get things done by trained professionals, but then what is

your contribution in that? Instead, if you make a person who is otherwise a total reject into someone useful, that is a big service you have done for him.

With these words in mind we took up the challenge at Rikhia. We started with the girls because they were the most neglected in the community. The parents did not even consider it necessary to send them to school or educate them. These little girls were doomed to a life of doing odd jobs at homes which perhaps no one else cared to do. In other words, they were considered good for nothing or a burden on the family.

With his wonderful ways, Swami Satyananda changed all that. He gave them the name 'kanya', which immediately exalted their position in the minds of everyone as kanya worship is an integral part of Indian society, so much so that every Indian rich or poor, educated or illiterate, has utmost faith in the ritual of kanya pooja. To my mind that worked wonders for them, for some deep-rooted change began to occur just by this recognition given to them.

The method we used was first of all to allow them their own free space without making any demands on them to come regularly. In other words, they should want to come out of their own sweet will. Then arose the question of what we should teach them.

Yoga was the natural option as we were all trained yoga teachers and we all knew how beneficial yoga would be for their expansion of mind. But then we decided to ask them what they wanted to learn instead of imposing our choices on them. Imagine our surprise when they said English! Those ragged, snotty-nosed kids, who could not even speak their own mother tongue properly, wanted to learn the most sophisticated language of our age.

So the English lessons started. Sometimes they came, sometimes they didn't. But we did not react to that. One fine morning when the kids had not turned up, some of us sannyasins were chanting the morning prayers in Sanskrit, followed by kirtan, when a few of them turned up and asked to

join in. They liked it so much that they began to come regularly and soon learnt all the chants and kirtans effortlessly.

Gradually, we noticed a marked change in their confidence levels. They responded better; they looked brighter; they moved with ease, grace and poise. They became more and more enthusiastic about all their activities and thus learnt quicker. The chanting of mantras had worked wonders for expanding the frontiers of their mind, making them more receptive to the unfoldment of knowledge.

After all, expansion of mind is that phenomenon which opens all the unseen locks of the mind that prevent the removal of ignorance. This was taking place in these children through the constant chanting of Sanskrit mantras. Sanskrit is a phonetic language based purely on sound frequency. In that respect, it differs from other languages which have developed for the purpose of communication.

Through the medium of sound, Sanskrit activates energy centres located in the mouth, throat, nasal tract, epiglottis and tongue, which are directly linked to higher centres in the brain. To achieve this, the only requirement is that the pronunciation should be perfect and the chanting should be regular. They fulfilled both these conditions and we can see the results.

The chanting of mantras and kirtan are an integral part of nada yoga which utilizes *dhvani*, or sound, to awaken the inner potential. Along with nada yoga, we introduced them to the ritual of yajna, which is a fire ceremony performed with the chanting of mantras. These simple methods have worked wonders for them.

Today the attendance of girls in the nearby school is one hundred percent and they carry away all the prizes for distinction in all subjects. With this marked improvement in the kanyas, we then decided to include the little boys as well or else the girls of Rikhia would soon begin to overshadow them. Swami Satyananda named them 'batuks', as the batuk too plays an important role in the kanya worship and this has created a wonderful competitive spirit between them.

Today their minds have opened up to a whole new world out there. They can hope, aspire, dream and even become what they dream to be. Previously, they were like the proverbial frog in the well that could not even imagine a world beyond the walls of the well where he was born, lived and died. All this was possible only because a very special person, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, happened to step into their lives one fine afternoon in 1989 and started the establishment of a gurukul system of education.

5

Balanced Education

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Children need to be mischievous. If they are not allowed to be mischievous and are suppressed or restricted, they will become bad later and their parents will not be able to control them. When children are naughty in a small apartment, it is very difficult for their parents to handle them due to restricted space, but if there is a property like an ashram, who cares? The children can run five times from one end of the boundary to the other. They can play, make mischief and exhaust all their energy, then they sleep well. That kind of mischief is *bal lila*, child's play.

Children have an excess of energy. Therefore, they need to run, play and enjoy a lot of games. It is not good for them to simply sit and study alone. Their energy has to be balanced. Parents have a very bad habit of nagging their children, and saying, "You are not studying. Have you done your homework?" Children are never asked, "Why don't you go and play football?" or "There is a good movie showing today. Take some money and go and see it." People think their children have the same level of consciousness as they do.

The levels of consciousness of a father and his six year-old child are entirely different. When the child says, "I want to see a movie," there is a different idea in his mind to when the father who is twenty-eight or thirty wants to see a movie. Children do not have an impure motivation; their level of awareness is very high. Children are very close to God. It is

true that children are pure. This state of innocence is described in the first part of the *Ramacharitamanas* where the childhood of Rama is described.

Arrangements must be made for games or sports to become a subject at school. Games could be compulsory for all children except those who have physical problems. Games, drama and music competitions need to go on side by side with intellectual pursuits. What is the use of teaching your child that Akbar was born in 1615 and Aurangzeb in 1750? Who wants to know all this history? When children have time and want to read, then let them, but do not impose study as a part of their education. It is not necessary to overburden children with too much bookish knowledge.

Children do not become great through study or qualifications. They become great through the quality of their mind, intelligence and receptivity. This is based upon how much they are able to receive, retain and give. It does not mean that one should not study. One must have qualifications because today this is the system throughout the world and we must respect it. But when children are continually asked, "Have you done your homework?" they become scared of not getting first class marks in their exams. They worry about what their parents will say because if they fail, they know they will have to face the music.

School children are always afraid that they might fail in their exams. What does it matter if they fail? Parents should tell their children, "Never mind, if you fail you can try again." But parents do not have the courage to say such things, so their children think, "Other students are fighting for a first division. If I only get a second division, what will Daddy say?" This idea, which is drilled into the minds of children, ruins their entire personality. Instead the child should be told, "Go and study if you like, but do not bother too much about it."

We know that many students who lagged behind in their school studies went on to have brilliant careers. Isaac Newton, who discovered the law of gravity, was a poor student, but he

became the foremost scientist and today the law of gravity is the basis of every scientific experiment. If a child is a dull student it does not mean that he will remain dull all his life. In my school days I was very bad at mathematics, but today I can do any calculation without a calculator. You have to be able to tackle the problems of life, whether business, family or institutional. If you cannot, then what is the use of being a first class student?

The popular notion is that if children play and have fun, they will fail in their studies and in life, but it is not true. However, if they have time to play and have fun, they will be successful, and if they study too much, they will spoil their lives. Playing balances the muscular and nervous energies of children and it circulates blood throughout the system many times over. If a child sits in front of the TV all day or studies with one leg up on the table, his blood circulation becomes very sluggish like a choked drain. His studies suffer.

The power of children to grasp new things is normally so strong that the teacher needs to teach them something only once. Children listen to a song from the cinema just once and they are able to memorize it, yet they need a tutor to help them learn from the schoolbooks. Children should be left free to play. I grieve to see what is being done to children these days.

Usually there is a very big gap between the mental state of teachers and young school students. While teaching one has to be mindful of this gap. One has to come down to the level of the students in order to teach them. A teacher must not always be saying, "Do this; don't do that." Don't always try to find fault with the child. A teacher is neither a policeman nor a hunter. Rather he should be a loving companion who can become their teacher when the child is ten or twelve years old. Until the age of seven, forget that you have to teach children anything. There should be education through positive samskaras. Children should be allowed to grow and develop in a natural way: to sing, play, make noise and do mischief. There is nothing wrong with that.

An important point to remember is not to tell the child what is right and wrong, good and bad. This distinction is the complex of a guilty mind. Do not put this sense of guilt into the minds of children. When they grow up and become adults they will know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad. Even birds and animals know this. Parents should not tell their children to read a lot, study hard or try to be great or important. Let them enjoy their schooling. They should think that their teachers in the school are good, loving and friendly. This will generate a feeling of unity in their hearts.

6

Yoga and Education

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

What is education?

A lot of thought has gone into what yoga can offer to education as a whole. Generally, when we speak of yoga aiding the process of education, we talk of one component: in terms of either memory or retention power, or increasing the intelligence of different human beings, or learning to cope with stress in classroom situations. However, the yogic concept of education is slightly different and covers a lot of ground.

We have two ideas about education. One idea is books, tables and chairs, and the other idea is the individual. We have limited education to books, tables and chairs and we have forgotten the human being who has to study. In fact, if we look at the education systems prevailing in the world today and the subjects that are taught in the different colleges and universities, we can see that they are providing job-oriented education. Job-oriented education is learning which aids the process of attaining a job in society, whether it is physics, chemistry, biology, medical science, anatomy and physiology or history. Right from our childhood, until the time we eventually pass university and try to become established in life, the whole thrust of our training in school and in college is to obtain a job, a career, status in life.

Sometimes I wonder if that is the real education a human being should imbibe. The conclusion I have come to is “No!” This form of education is necessary, but it is not conducive to

educating the human person. So, firstly we have to rethink how we wish to educate ourselves and, secondly, we have to think about what the aim of education is.

It is in this context that education becomes important because it is my belief that a proper education is not available to us. We need to move from the system of job-oriented education into self-education, and self-education is where yoga comes in: learning to channel the faculties of the human personality, of human nature; learning to focus the mind, to have clarity of mind, concentration of mind; and learning to recognize the principles that govern a human personality in the form of strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs.

I am not going to talk about classroom education because frankly I do not agree with it, and I am thankful and grateful to God and to guru who made sure that I did not go into a classroom environment to study, because looking back, if I had done so I would be a mess today. I often hear parents tell their children, “Be a man, be brave.” When children fall down and hurt themselves, we say to them, “Don’t cry, be brave, be a man.” When children are in need of support, affection, love and encouragement, we say to them, “Look after yourself!” This is where and this is how education actually begins in society today. In one of our cranial flashes (I’m not using the term ‘mental flashes’) we begin to think that children or individuals need to be independent and free, and that freedom, in our mind, means that they do not need to have any support, encouragement or guidance. If that is the freedom humanity is aspiring for, I prefer bondage and love and compassion. I don’t need that kind of freedom.

Real education begins with SWAN principle

The growth of an individual begins with positive interaction between the parent and the child. Our concept of education has to change from classroom education to personal education; expressing in our environment the samskaras, intellect and intelligence that the child will imbibe.

The first stage of education is the recognition of the SWAN principle in each and every individual, recognizing the strength, weaknesses, ambitions and needs of the individual and cultivating, strengthening and understanding these different principles of their nature. We have discussed the SWAN principle and its application previously in chapter 3.

Patanjali's system of raja yoga

In the second stage of education we extend the awareness outside to enhance the mental abilities. One of the practices before *dharana*, concentration of the mind, is extension of the mind. In order to focus the faculties of the mind to a point, you need to be able to extend the faculties of the mind in order to know what they are. Patanjali's system of raja yoga is appropriate for this. We talk of *pratyahara* as withdrawal of the senses, but that is the last stage of *pratyahara*. The first stage of *pratyahara* is extension of the senses into the outside world. We talk of *dharana* as concentration of mind and mental awareness, but that is the last stage of *dharana*. The first stage of *dharana* is extension of mental awareness outside into the environment. We talk of *dhyana*, meditation, as experiencing the harmony within, but that is the last stage of *dhyana*. The first stage is to experience the harmony outside. If you cannot experience the harmony outside, how can you feel it inside? We talk of *samadhi* as being the process of enlightenment inside, but that is the last stage. The first stage of *samadhi* is optimum harmony on the outside, because only then can you experience the optimum harmony on the inside. So, we have to look not at the last and final stages of *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, but at the first stages: extension of mind, of awareness, involvement in the outer world, becoming creative, becoming open, understanding our interactions, how we are, where we are in the family, in society, in the world. This is the second stage of yogic education.

Be what you are

The third stage of yogic education is meditation in its broad sense. I am not speaking of meditation in relation to the dhyana of Patanjali, but as a process of being what you are, accepting yourself as you are. There is a story about Mulla Nasruddin, a great Sufi master of the eighteenth century. One day he went to a fair. There was a shooting contest and Mulla Nasruddin, being the greatest master of his age, suddenly decided to participate in the contest. Each person had three arrows with which to hit the bull's-eye, which was about one hundred metres away. As word spread that this great Sufi master was going to participate, thousands came and packed the area where the archery contest was being held.

Mulla Nasruddin picked up the bow, the first arrow, took his stance, checked the direction of the wind, checked the string and the strength of the string, pulled down his cap, took very careful aim at the bull's-eye and let the arrow fly. Unfortunately for him the arrow went wide of its mark. There was a twitter and giggle from the crowd, "The great master misses the mark!" Mulla Nasruddin had a very intelligent disciple. The disciple thought, "There must be a reason why my master missed his mark." So he said, "Master, can you explain why your arrow went wide of its mark?" Mulla Nasruddin thanked his disciple for saving him and said, "Yes, I can explain. The person who shot the arrow was over-confident and an over-confident person misses the mark many times."

It was time for the second arrow to fly and Mulla Nasruddin again took aim, but this time he was nervous. He let the arrow fly. The arrow flew half way and then dropped down. The intelligent disciple again said, "Master, can you explain who the person was who shot the second arrow?" Mulla Nasruddin said, "Yes, I can explain. This was the under-confident one who thinks, 'I can't achieve my goal at any time'." The crowd started to clap at these beautiful words of wisdom.

It was time for the third arrow to fly. Mulla simply picked it up and ‘bang!’, it hit the bull’s-eye. Very proudly Mulla went and collected his prize and marched off. The disciple again said, “Master, before you march off with the prize, please tell us who shot the third arrow?” And Mulla said, “That was me.”

If you can be you, if you can learn to accept your idiosyncrasies, if you can learn to accept your shortcomings and your nature and if you can avoid putting on different masks, which we all do at different times in our lives, you will be on the path of meditation. Be yourself and once you begin this process of meditation, education starts.

The yogic concept of education

Education is a system through which we learn proper expression in life. We can even call it a science of behaviour, a science of performing creatively and constructively in our life, a process of learning how to live. This is the yogic concept of education.

Our modern concept of education is enhancing the ability of our intellect. Compare these two different concepts: enhancing the abilities of the intellect, which is job-oriented education, and enhancing the process of learning and living creatively and constructively, which is yogic education or self-oriented education. When I use the term ‘self-oriented’, I do not mean it in the sense that we confine ourselves within ourselves; rather it is becoming aware of the self as a whole. As mentioned above, the learning process which relates to life, to our behaviour, attitude and thinking happens before the age of eight. Therefore, we have to think, “What should the process of education be that enhances our learning in life during our formative years?” It is my firm belief that we do not learn about the quality of life through books on history, chemistry, medicine and biology. We learn about the quality of life through our interaction with the environment, with the family and also through our interaction with our culture. Therefore, I repeat again that real education happens in the

first seven or eight years of life. Education which deals with life happens in these years. It is in this context that we have to see the role of parents and of yoga. Afterwards we receive academic education.

The practices of yoga

Let us look at the role of yoga. Take, for example, the process of visualization. In yoga the process of visualization is an aspect of the pratyahara techniques. What is pratyahara? Literally, it means withdrawing the senses and also feeding the senses. *Pratyaha* means 'the seed', 'the impression', *ahara* means 'to feed the impressions of the mind'. That is the literal meaning of the word *pratyahara*, although we have taken it to mean withdrawal and isolation of mind. Pratyahara is a very interesting subject because in this practice you learn to extend your perception outside into the outer world. The vision, taste, smell, sounds, tactile impressions, the faculties of the senses have to be developed, have to be evolved to their maximum capacity. After you know the limits of your senses you gradually withdraw them, not only the physical senses but also the mental senses. You have to go back in memory, you have to bring out the images that are deeply embedded in your memory and then experience the state of wellbeing, tranquillity and peace. In order to achieve this, many different techniques have been prescribed in yoga for grownups as well as children. These practices are yoga nidra, antar mouna and ajapa japa. They are important for adults so that they have the ability to relax and let go, and they are also important for children so that they become attuned to their personality and nature.

Antar mouna means inner silence, witnessing and observing the thoughts, but before you can witness, observe and stop the chattering of the mind, you have to create thoughts. *Ajapa japa*, awareness of breath with mantra, is possibly the most important practice for grownups and children. In the ancient vedic tradition, at the age of eight, whether male or female, children were taught three things: the practice

of surya namaskara to develop and maintain the activity of the thymus gland; the practice of nadi shodhana, alternate nostril breathing, to stimulate the pineal gland; and the practice of Gayatri mantra, which has twenty-four syllables, to increase concentration, to develop retention power and mental tranquility.

Stress and what it indicates

Once I was staying in a house in Delhi and I heard a boy of not more than six years say to his mother, “Mother, I’m in tension!” I was surprised that a six year-old child had the word tension in his vocabulary. I did not know what tension was until I was about eighteen. I did not know what a headache was until I was twenty-three. What did this indicate? Something was not right. The child did not have the training to focus his attention, his mind, his thoughts and his learning process.

Therefore, I believe that the combination of surya namaskara (salute to the sun), nadi shodhana pranayama (alternate nostril breathing) and ajapa japa, combined with breath awareness can play a very vital role in stimulating the psyche and reducing the external, material, physical, sensual and sensory stimulations. Once we are able to reduce our external sensual and sensorial stimulation, the psyche begins to develop and the power of the psyche is experienced. I am not talking of education as a process of enhancing one’s intellect, but as a process of living and interacting. The ability to focus the dissipated nature of the mind is a training which everyone must have, so they can come in contact with the various aspects of the body, the emotions, feelings and the intellect.

Dharana

Earlier I gave you the example of how we tell our children, “Be brave, be a man.” When our children fall down and hurt themselves, we say to them, “Don’t cry.” When something happens we give them an input, but is that input the right

one for the child to receive from the parents, from us? We tell our children the only emotion they can express in life is anger and violence. We do not tell them, “Look, you are free, you wish to cry, so cry.” We stop them from expressing their emotions, so there is already an emotional block created in the child because of our attitude, because of our perception of life which is incomplete. This is where dharana has to come in. Although dharana means focusing of the mind, it also means balancing and harmonizing the emotional aspects.

The dharanas are of three kinds:

1. *Chidakasha dharana*: dharana of the mind, concentration of the mind
2. *Hridayakasha dharana*: dharana of the heart, focusing of the energies that govern emotion and feeling, channelling those energies
3. *Daharakasha dharana*: dharana of the deep instincts and psyche, focusing and channelling the instincts and harmonizing the psyche.

Dharana is a very important practice for children. Along with the games, along with the visualizations, along with creative living, they learn to appreciate the process of interaction that happens at every stage of their life.

Human consciousness

Meditation is necessary because it opens up the way to realize the potential of human consciousness. What is consciousness? What is mind? We talk of the body and we talk of the brain, but yoga speaks of mind and yoga speaks of consciousness as well. Consciousness is the all encompassing awareness, without any boundaries and distinctions. Mind is the manifest aspect of consciousness which relates to the world, the environment, at the present time. Although modern psychology has divided the mind up into different categories: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious, yogis have described the mind as an attribute of consciousness, and the consciousness as having four different stages of expression and experience: (i) *jagrat*, the awakened state, the wakeful state; (ii) *swapna*,

the dreaming state, a stage where you are neither awake nor asleep; (iii) *nidra*, sleep, the unconscious, and (iv) *turiya*, the state of inner effulgence in which you realize your being. These are the four attributes of consciousness. Jagrat has been compared to the conscious, swapna to the subconscious, *nidra* to the unconscious, but I believe English does not have the proper words to define the actual states of consciousness, and these four states are only broad categories.

The great author Abhinav Gupta, who wrote two beautiful treatises on tantra, *Tantra Loka* and *Tantra Sara*, has described twenty-one states of consciousness. Each stage is different from the previous one. What does this indicate? That our knowledge, our perception, our understanding of human consciousness, of human personality, of the human mind is very limited. It is a feat of analysis, logic and understanding if somebody, through years of study and research, can define twenty-one states of consciousness. This is only one example of how deep you can go into the study of human nature.

We are talking of consciousness and you can give a shape to the consciousness in the formative years, you can give a shape to the awakened state of consciousness which relates to the outer world through the senses, through the mind, the *indriyas*. You can give a form to the state of consciousness which is in between the awakened and the dormant state – the dreaming state, but this dreaming state of consciousness is actually the subtle consciousness. *Nidra* is the causal consciousness. You can give it a shape, a form, an identity and this happens through the processes of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. A beginning has to be made. Begin with the tools that you have, practise what you know with sincerity, dedication and commitment. Practise what you know with faith, sincerity and commitment to transform your attitude and outlook. Practise with sincerity to develop understanding of your nature and your child's nature.

In ancient civilizations there used to be a method of knowing the nature of the child. At the age of eight, before being taught the practices of *asana*, *pranayama* and *mudra*,

the child was put in a room in which different objects had been placed. People would watch to see which object the child was attracted to. When a child picked up the first object, the parents would get an idea of how the child was going to develop in the course of his life. There is a story about it. A rich person placed four items in the room: money, a gun, a rosary and a bottle of wine. He thought, "If the child goes to pick up the money he will become a big businessman, if the child picks up the gun I know he will become a criminal, if the child picks up the rosary I know he will become a saint, and if the child picks up the bottle of wine I know he will become a sensual drunkard." An eight-year-old child went into the room, looked around, picked up the money and put it into his pocket, picked up the gun and put it into another pocket, picked up the bottle and drank it, picked up the rosary and walked out the door. The father said, "My God, he's going to be a politician!"

Do not let this happen to your child. Give your child the opportunity to grow in life with proper support and encouragement. Parents have to become the support group for the child. Parents have to provide the child with the opportunity to express his or her creativity. If we can do that, we will see a new sun shine over this world.

Educating the mind in a balanced way (excerpts on value-based education)

There is no doubt that education has played a very important and vital role in the development and evolution of humanity. At the same time we are experiencing a crisis of identity because we have not been able to train and discipline our mind. The world around us offers many good things; it also attracts and nurtures our beliefs, desires and ambitions. However, the growth of our personality at present is directed outwards and in this process we tend to lose touch with our inner nature.

Now, many people believe that the inner nature deals with spiritual life. Maybe it does, but there is another aspect

of our inner nature. The human mind has the capacity to develop and utilize the wisdom, the knowledge and the understanding which we gain in life through our interactions in society. At the same time there is also the possibility of finding the source of peace and discovering the nature of the human spirit.

These are the concepts which have guided different philosophies. Yoga also says that one must learn to educate the human mind. But what is education of the mind? What is learnt today in school through academic studies are intellectual concepts. Intellect is only one aspect of the human mind. There are other aspects of the mind which do not deal with, or reflect the law of the written word, but are more intuitive in nature. In yoga we call these *samskaras*. *Samskaras* are impressions, psychological conditions. We receive *samskaras* from our environment, our culture, our society, our family, our lifestyle. However, the *samskaras* that we imbibe today are not conducive to self-discipline and self-awareness, and make us more stressed and involved in the world of the senses.

The reason for existence is total participation with awareness of the outer experience and the inner experience. When we look at our children we wish them the best that we can offer and that a society can offer. But at the same time we see that the growth of their personalities is hampered by the stresses of society.

What are the pressures to which we are subjecting our children? With such pressures how do we expect them to grow, to cope with the distractions of life, to become creative and successful in their lives? What is the form of our education? What is it that we lack? I decided that *samskaras*, impressions, are needed in our lives. According to yoga, *samskaras* are an education which deals with the balanced and harmonious growth of the human mind, thoughts, expressions, behaviour and attitudes, leading to a realization that, "My life is not only material, but has another dimension which is spiritual."

The body and the mind have their roles to play in life, but it is the *samskaras* and inner disciplines which have a more

dynamic role to play. Yoga begins with discipline too. This discipline is physical and mental, as well as spiritual. Discipline means knowledge of the self. The word for discipline in Hindi is *amushashan*. *Shashan* means 'to rule, to govern' and *anu* means 'the subtle aspect, the subtle nature'. When we are able to govern, to harmonize our subtle personality then that is the true concept of discipline.

In November 1994, there was a conference in Paris in which three hundred educators from seventeen countries participated. The theme of this conference was 'Inventing Tomorrow's Education Today'. The main subject dealt with was yoga. I had the honour to represent yoga. At the end of the deliberations we made certain resolutions and declarations which were submitted to the respective governments of the seventeen countries. All the declarations suggested that the yogic form of education be incorporated into our formal education system.

An attempt is also being made in India to introduce yoga at the upper primary level and from there onward to the college level. Without talking about high metaphysical philosophies, we hope that by incorporating certain basic practices into the school syllabus, we can increase the students' awareness, memory, concentration and ability to relax. In turn, this will assist them in the development of their own personality and nature. This is just a small step, but nevertheless it is a beginning and it is also the need of today. Give the future generations a chance and give yoga a chance. If you can do that, you will see a beautiful dawn in this new century.

7

Enhancing the Ability to Study

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Yoga is a very important subject for children. Just as we go to school to be educated and to increase the capacity of our intellect, when we practise yoga we increase our capacity to learn much more.

When the famous saint, Swami Vivekananda, was living in Chicago, USA, he used to go to the library, borrow large volumes of books, take them home and return them the next day. After some time the librarian became curious and asked him, “Why do you take out so many books when you can’t possibly read them all in one day?” Swami Vivekananda replied that he read each and every page of every book. The librarian could not believe it, and so Swami Vivekananda asked her to test him. She opened a book, selected a page and paragraph, and asked him to tell her what was written there. Swami Vivekananda repeated the sentence exactly as it was written in the book, without looking at it. The librarian was astounded and did more tests. Each time Swami Vivekananda repeated the exact words written in the book.

Later the librarian discovered that Swami Vivekananda had a photographic memory. He did not have to read books. His eyes, his mind, would capture the image on the page, and whenever he wished, he could just recall a book, a page, a sentence. That was the capacity of his brain and mind. How did he develop this capacity? He did not have it when he was ordinary Narendra, before he became Swami Vivekananda.

His life story tells us that he had many difficulties and problems in his early life. Yet when he started to practise yoga with sincerity, he was able to develop that quality of the brain known as photographic memory.

We can also develop the potential and quality of our brain and mind provided we know how to use and apply yoga. Yoga is not a subject for spiritual development or spiritual realization. Rather, as the tradition says, yoga is a subject for dealing with the mind. As students, you have faced your mind. You know how difficult it is to focus on study, how difficult it is to remember things, how at examination time, despite being full of confidence, all the effort you have put into your studies suddenly dissipates and your mind becomes blank in the exam room. Most people have had that experience. We know that to deal with the brain and to develop its potential is very difficult. But yoga provides the solution.

Exams, memory and concentration

Students often ask how to develop concentration, how to face exams without getting nervous, and how to memorize. One of the faculties of mind is memory, another is intellect and another is understanding. Intellect, memory and understanding are the three faculties that students have to manage.

In the past people have thought a lot about how to improve the quality of the body and mind. The yoga techniques were devised in accordance with the natural laws of the body. The body has many glands, and in children the most important one is the pineal gland in the centre of the head, which is responsible for the development of the cerebral, mental faculty. Yoga says that if you can maintain the health of the pineal gland, which begins to decay after the age of eight, then the learning process, the capacity to retain information and the memory improve.

To maintain the health of the pineal gland, three techniques were devised. The first is surya namaskara, which most of you have practised. The second is trataka, for developing

concentration. The third is pranayama, to balance the two hemispheres of the brain.

Surya namaskara

The practice of surya namaskara is composed of five different postures which influence different organs and glands in the body, ensuring they perform in an optimum manner. *Surya namaskara* means ‘salute to the sun’. It is to be practised in the morning, when there is calm and quiet, when you are fresh and not under tension and stress from study. It is done to improve the circulation of the blood, to energize the different parts and organs of the body and to control the breath.

The breath plays a very important role. When you are angry, or tense, or frustrated, your breathing will become very shallow and very fast. When you are relaxed and peaceful, the breathing will be deep and long. Scientifically, it has been proven that the breath controls many activities of the brain and that with control of the breath we can alter the state of the mind, reduce the stress level in the brain and nervous system, and experience harmony and tranquillity.

Trataka

Trataka is the most effective practice for developing concentration. During exam time, if you do five minutes before you begin your studies, you will find it very useful. Light a candle and place it so that the flame is at eye level. Look straight at the flame without blinking the eyes for half a minute, or as long as you are able to keep your eyes open. When you feel the need, close your eyes and see the after-image of the flame in front of the closed eyes. When the after-image disappears, the screen in the forehead becomes black. Then open the eyes and again look at the flame without blinking the eyes. Whenever you close your eyes, you will see the after-image of the flame, and you look at that. You will find that the image moves, it won't remain static. Sometimes it will move up, to the left, to the right, or down, it will keep moving. So you have to make an effort to hold that image

fixed at one point and not allow it to move. Do this for five minutes before going to sleep and before you begin your studies. In a couple of days you will find you are able to memorize and retain whatever you read more easily. This practice develops mental concentration. It is most important for success in studies.

Pranayama

Bhramari pranayama, plugging the ears and humming like a bee, balances the two hemispheres of the brain. One part of the brain is known as the right brain hemisphere, the other part is known as the left brain hemisphere. Many times in the right brain there is nothing left and in the left brain there is nothing right! So when there is nothing left in the right brain and nothing right in the left brain, then you cannot focus, concentrate, study or succeed in life. In order to integrate the faculties of both hemispheres of the brain, there is a practice known as nadi shodhana pranayama.

Nadi shodhana has to be done in a specific way. First of all, imagine a staircase. If we look at a staircase from the side, we will see the steps. We have to coordinate our breath as if we are climbing the steps. For example, if we have to climb seven steps in one breath, we visualize, we breathe in and step up, we hold the breath, we breathe in, step up, we hold the breath, we breathe in, step up, etc. So, one inhalation is broken into seven steps. Then we breathe out in the same manner, so the exhalation is also in seven steps.

First close the right nostril. Breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold. You take seven steps in one breath. Then breathe out and come down the seven steps in the same way. Now, close the left nostril, open the right nostril, and again breathe in – hold – breathe in – hold – for a total of seven steps. Then breathe out and come all the way down the seven steps. If you feel any strain, reduce the number of steps. Repeat the same pattern about five times with each nostril to complete the practice of nadi

shodhana pranayama. If you understand and try this practice, you will find that the retention capacity of the brain will increase. You will be able to memorize and concentrate with much less effort.

To succeed in your studies and to develop control over the mind, these three practices are a must.

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal

The children who have been demonstrating the practices today are from *Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal* (BYMM), Children's Yoga Fellowship. BYMM has about 121,000 members aged between eight and fourteen, and they look after their own organization and manage their own affairs. After the age of fourteen, the children retire from this organization and join another one for teenagers. Until the age of fourteen, we teach basic yoga practices only. Over the years we have found that many children who are weak in their studies initially are able to give excellent performances. There have been times when the children have been occupied in teaching yoga to other children in different parts of the country and have not had time for their own studies. Then just before the exams, they go through their books, take the exam and make the merit list. We do not teach the children many practices, only the most basic ones that students can use to improve their studies and mind.

Yoga nidra

Here is a success story. Once a small boy came to the ashram and although he was never sent to school, he was taught science, arts, commerce, languages, etc., by a special practice known as yoga nidra. Yoga nidra is a technique that you can do before you fall asleep in bed at night, but you need a teacher to guide you. While the boy was sleeping, his teacher would give him instructions, which would be registered by the mind. Often the teacher would read chapters from books. The next day, when the boy was awake, he would read the same chapter and the boy would say, "I know that subject, I

know the content,” and he would be able to describe what was written in the chapter. This was an experiment which shows that our mind is able to register information even when we are asleep.

Later, we did an experiment where we gave a young German girl the practice of yoga nidra and taught her various things during this type of sleep. When her parents sent her to school, she came home on the first day and said, “I don’t need to go anymore because I already know everything they are teaching there.” When she was put into the next class, she said the same thing. Today that girl has attended school very little and still knows all the subjects. Tests have been taken and she has passed every one. She is only fourteen now, but last year was admitted into a college. This is an example of how the technique of yoga nidra can work on the human mind.

Make yoga a habit

The beneficial effects of yoga are many; therefore, work towards making yoga a part of life. If you are sincerely committed to the practice of yoga, within one year you will be a different student. If for one year you practise surya namaskara, trataka and nadi shodhana pranayama seriously, your problems will change. Whereas today you say you have difficulty in concentration and attention, next year you will be saying you have outgrown your school and cannot obtain admission anywhere because you are too young. So, you decide which problem you want to face – lack of concentration or the problem of excellence.

The problem of excellence means you have committed yourself. Therefore, do not think of yoga as a set of physical exercises that we do for health or for eradicating disease or illness. Think of yoga as a way to improve and develop the strength and quality of the brain and the mind. Then you will have a very successful life all the way from your studies to your future life. This is the message of yoga for all of you – practise yoga with such determination and dedication that it becomes a habit in your life.

8

Questions and Answers about Yoga for Children

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Would you speak to us about the consciousness of children?

To begin, let us not look at consciousness as belonging to a child or an adult. Let us look at the idea of consciousness as yoga believes it to be. Consciousness is energy and at the same time it is a state of being.

There are two states: one state is of becoming, when we use the potential, the activity and the power to change what we are at present to something else; and the other state is being. We become, we are.

In consciousness both these possibilities exist: of becoming and of being, and these possibilities actualize themselves when in the right environment. When we are born, our consciousness is pure, without any influences or impressions of the present day environment and that pure consciousness remains with us in our young days until the age of eight. This state of consciousness is like a sponge; it is simply absorbing everything: absorbing all the information, absorbing the information received through the senses, absorbing the information received through the interactions, absorbing the information received through the intellectual and emotional inputs. In this manner, the consciousness conditions itself to survive and to exist in this material plane.

Until the age of eight, the information, which is received by the consciousness is purely intuitive. I would also say

non-linear, non-sequential information is received, the idea of the right brain and the left brain hemispheres. When we begin our school education a change happens in the pattern of consciousness and we begin a sequential learning process, a linear learning process. The moment the sequential linear learning process begins our personality changes; we become fixed to certain ideas, that A is before B, C follows B and an understanding like this is developed. That understanding is a very set understanding and this is where the personality undergoes a major transformation in life.

Swami Sivananda used to say that the nature, the personality, the mindset of a child is like a lump of clay. You can give it any shape you want. The families contribute to giving shape to that consciousness. The culture in which we live, the social environment in which we live, the religious environment in which we live, the educational environment in which we live, all contribute to the formation of the human consciousness.

The Indian tradition and the yogic traditions say that development of consciousness at all levels happens before the age of eight; intuitive, spiritual, cultural, social, personal, psychic, everything happens before the age of eight, before we actually join the first class of primary school. The day we join the first class of primary school this development stops and linear development begins.

The education received by the consciousness until the age of eight is given the name *samskara*. They are impressions, which superimpose themselves on consciousness. The information which we receive after the age of eight in school is known as *shiksha*. Samskara is received until the age of eight and shiksha after the age of eight. The yogic traditions, the Indian traditions, have greatly emphasized the need for samskara, because in your future life, when you are thirty, when you are forty, when you are sixty, you become that person when you grow up; you express those qualities and those habits, which you have imbibed before the age of eight. What you are today is what you were made before the age of eight. And what you were made after the age of eight is seen in the

papers, in the degrees and diplomas which you have in your homes, in your bags and in your place of work. That is your qualification to survive in the world, which you received after the age of eight. But the *swabhava*, the nature, the mind and the responses of the mind, the ability to manage situations in life and to deal with people, all these abilities you have gained in your childhood in that subtle education that was imbibed by consciousness. It is this consciousness which has to be nurtured more and more.

There have been many people in the world who with the right training have developed in a different way from other people. We have experimented with such people. A German family used to come to the ashram (and they still do) with their small two-year-old daughter. They wanted to bring up their daughter from the yogic perspective. So I suggested some yoga nidra practices and gave a name to their daughter. She was totally innocent. What can a child of two years say? Nothing. But the most surprising thing was that after I gave the name, one week later I asked her, "What is your name?" and she said in German, "Ich bin Ommurti." I am Ommurti. And it struck me at that time how a two-year-old child could recognize a name, which is not in her language. Sanskrit and German are two different languages. Yet she identified with that name and said to me, "Ich bin Ommurti," when she could barely recognize her birth name, her German name.

Secondly, after she started her practices of yoga nidra her mind became so receptive and so sharp that when she started pre-school, the first day she said, "Now I know everything they are going to teach me" and she did not go back after one day. They took tests and she came out with flying colours in all the tests. After spending a few years at home enjoying herself practising her yoga nidra and sankalpa, when the time came to put her in the primary class, she went through the classes one after the other. The teachers did not know in which class to place her, because after a couple of months she would go to the next class. Today she is about nineteen or twenty years of age and is a properly qualified person,

and if she is asked how many years she has been to school in her life, she will say “about five”, and she has completed all her education.

When we see these kinds of events we begin to believe that there is a different mind beyond the rational, intellectual mind, which we call the psychic mind, or you can call it the intuitive mind or the higher mind. When that higher mind kicks in the mental faculties open up and manifest. It is this nature which has to be cultivated in a child.

There are a few people who have been working with children for many years. One is Rishi Arundhati. Her tryst with children started in 1971 and I was her first guinea pig. Since then, she has been working continuously with children, independently, individually or in schools, bringing yoga to them. She has also written a beautiful book, published as *Yoga Education for Children: A Manual for Teaching Yoga to Children*.

It has been her experience also, and the experience of other people who have worked with children, that their receptivity is much greater than that of grownups. They understand things in a different way and in a better way because their mind is not cluttered with impressions, ideas and concepts. Their mind is free. While saying a little, they understand a lot. There is the limitation that they are not able to express themselves, not able to convey what they desire, or feel, or need, or want, but their mental frequencies are much higher than the pre-defined frequencies of grownups. Grownups function in pre-defined frequencies according to their education, but children are intuitive. The main thrust of yoga education for children is to provide them with the appropriate samskaras, which can be useful for them in their life.

Academics of consciousness

Now coming to the academics of consciousness. The normal consciousness is classified in four groups, four compartments: *jagrat* (waking), *swapna* (dreaming), *nidra* (sleeping), and *turiya* (spiritually awakened). But in children their consciousness

functions at a different level, at the intuitive level, until the age of eight. So their classification is different. It is *turiya-jagrat*, *turiya-swapna*, *turiya-nidra* and *turiya-turiya*. This is another classification of consciousness in a child. As we are educated in the linear, sequential system, the *turiya* component leaves and we simply remain *jagrat*, *swapna*, *nidra* and *turiya*. But in children it is *turiya jagrat* (intuitive and awake), *turiya swapna* (intuitive and dreaming), *turiya nidra* (intuitive and sleeping) and *turiya turiya* (intuitive and creative).

That is the major difference between the child's expression of the conscious faculties and a grownup's expression of the conscious faculties. I am sure in the course of time more psychologists and psychoanalysts will come to this understanding, that children have a different set of consciousness, which is *turiya*, the flowering of *turiya*, the highest intuitive spiritual awareness. We have lost that intuitive ability as a result of the sequential and linear understanding of education that we have received. So we need to move from *jagrat*, from the so-called present waking state, to *turiya*; we have to relearn how to become a child. This is what Christ also mentioned, to enter the kingdom of heaven become like a child again.

Our children have to go through a rigid curriculum, completely shut off. How can we help them?

We have been working with children for quite a few years. I believe that the pressures of study should be taken off them and that they should be taught how to relax. Children have very high intuition, a clean mental blackboard and they pick up many things which are not academic. In fact, according to yogic principles, the real education of a child happens from the time of his or her birth until the age of seven or eight. Academic education begins after that. But the basic programming of life is made between the ages of zero and eight. That is the crucial period for their education, when you teach them unconsciously how to live, how to look at and respond to the world. Unfortunately, that is the precise period in their lives which we have ignored completely.

Education is not only intellectual, not just going to school and studying. Academic education is job-oriented, providing the skills with which to compete in modern society. But personality is not only competition or intellect. Samskaras are the first impressions, the first part of the life education which children receive. Then samskaras are received from the family, from society, from the culture, from the lifestyle which they lead, and that becomes their launching pad. If the foundation of their lives is weak, then there is going to be a breakdown of values in the course of time. There is going to be a deterioration in their positive qualities and they will be subject to frustrations, anxieties and stress which will further limit the expression of their nature. For this reason, the pressure has to be taken off their studies. The education which I received was more a samskara education than a formal academic education. Parents can provide that opportunity.

What should parents be doing consciously to instil these samskaras?

Some experiments have been carried out with young children in Australia and Germany to see which yoga practices can help them improve. From birth until about the age of three, we give them the technique of yoga nidra combined with the chanting of mantras, for example, the Gayatri mantra and other mantras such as Mahamritunjaya mantra, Shiva mantras, Vaishnava mantras (see Chapter 22: Pratyahara and Dharana: Relaxation and Concentration).

In India we have made the mistake of linking mantras with religion, but *mantras* are actually sound vibrations which awaken the dormant aspects of our mind and brain through sound frequency. When an army is marching and has to cross a bridge, it has to break step, otherwise the synchronized vibration on the step would cause the bridge to collapse. When supersonic flights cross the sound barrier, the sound can shatter all the windows in the city. That means that every sound has a frequency, a wave which has the power to alter the existing patterns of the mind or emotions. Mantras perform

that function. Therefore, whenever you practise a mantra, you feel more tranquil, relaxed, at peace with yourself and with more inner strength.

If you ask westerners to repeat the mantra *Om namah Shivaya*, they do not have any preconceived notion of who Shiva is or even what the mantra means. When they repeat it they simply concentrate on the frequency of the sound vibration, and they benefit more because they are imbibing the real thing. It has not been filtered through the preconceived notion of, “Ah, it is a Shiva mantra, therefore, I am adoring Shiva”, or “I need to be fearful of Shiva. If I do something wrong he will punish me.”

With children, mantras have helped to awaken the dormant faculties of the mind and brain.

So should a child recite or chant a mantra every morning ?

Let the child listen to a cassette. We are talking of the period between birth and three years. There should also be positive input, sankalpas, which can be recorded and played, such as: “I will be creative in my life,” “I will excel in everything that I do.”

Even if they can't understand the words?

They don't need to understand the words because their subconscious will receive that impression, that positive samskara, and in the course of life it will bloom. Different experiments have been done with children, who have been taught languages and even academic subjects through yoga nidra. We take them through the stages of yoga nidra and at the end of the practice read a chapter from a book. Then again we give them a yoga nidra and that is it. If they are taught when the mind is relaxed and not distracted, the mind receives what they have been taught.

This has been the principle of the methods of ‘Super Learning’, which are coming now to the Indian market. There was a Bulgarian scientist, Dr Lozanov, who invented what is called the ‘System of Accelerated Learning and Training’

(SALT), with which I was involved in the early days in the United States. We used techniques of relaxation, breathing, mantra and music to enhance the learning abilities in children. From that experience I can say that children need to be taught how to relax. Relaxation is a state where the conscious activities become less dominant, the subconscious nature becomes more dominant and there are no unconscious psychological blocks. This system has been well accepted. It is based on yogic principles of relaxation and breathing techniques.

Even in our ancient Indian tradition, during the upanayan samskara ceremony at the age of eight, children were taught the Gayatri mantra. They were taught pranayama and also surya namaskara to regulate the hormones in the body and to ensure the proper development and growth of the body, brain and mind.

What are the basic practices children should do?

The basic asanas for children are surya namaskara and sarvangasana. They should be practised for a few minutes, preferably in the morning. Surya namaskara should be done twice, preferably dynamically. Two pranayamas should be practised: nadi shodhana (alternate nostril breathing) and bhamari (bumble bee breath). Plus the concentration practice known as trataka (candle gazing). That is enough until they pass college.

And listening to mantra?

Yes, instead of modern music, even at night, if they listen to the mantras for ten minutes it will help to tranquillize the hyperactivity of their nervous systems.

Should we make a tape?

You can get many tapes in the market. If, from the beginning, children have a samskara of relaxing with mantras, they will not have any problems.

Can adults follow the same theme? After all, we are just children who grew up.

Adults will have to work a bit harder. But if the next generation of adults follows the system, they won't have to work hard.

What about pregnant women? Does it make a difference to the child growing in the womb?

Oh yes! Today in the West doctors are telling mothers-to-be not to drink, not to smoke, not to become tense, not to fight, not to become negative. Medical practitioners are now giving these suggestions because the mental state of the mother does affect the embryo.

Does listening to mantras affect the child in the womb?

Definitely, although it may not affect the child directly.

But it affects the mother?

More research has to be done, but in the tradition we have the example of Abhimanyu, of Astavakra, and other people, including Lao Tse in China. These examples are intended to show that children can be profoundly affected by the chanting of mantras by their mothers or fathers. We can believe that there is some validity in such concepts. The child derives its body from the father; the body is the product of the merger between sperm and ova. But the nature, the way of thinking, interacting and feeling is given to the child by the mother. The father is the giver of the body, the mother is the giver of the mind and society is the giver of influences which determine our direction in life. Mothers have to be aware of the fact that, ultimately, they are responsible for the total development and growth of the child. Therefore, the mother should lead a more balanced and healthier lifestyle than the father.

What about working mothers?

They are free to work, but when they come home they should have a one hour routine in which they can release the tensions

and pressures of work, connect with the embryo, with the baby inside, and give positive vibrations and feelings.

Our lives are punctuated with situations of deceit. How do you use dharma in your everyday life?

We have to see who the beneficiary of an action would be. Will it improve another person's attitude and behaviour? If you would have been the only beneficiary and nobody else in society, then I would say, "Think twice." But if there is a chance of improving human society by such an action, then definitely 'pick up the bow and fight the Kauravas'. That was the message which Krishna gave. Krishna made the Mahabharata war, not out of animosity towards the Kauravas or for what they had done to the Pandavas, but to establish a principle of righteousness. You have to see it from a broader perspective, not as a conflict between yourself and the other person, but what the eventual and final outcome of that conflict would be between the two parties.

Even Hitler in his own warped way probably thought he was benefiting society by killing all the Jews.

Yes, but then you also have to see the intention. Is the intention to gain power by the suppression of a nation or people or society? Or is the intention to generate an awareness of righteousness in people? If the intention is power by suppression, then we definitely have to rethink. But I do not believe that the end result of dharma is always the upliftment of everyone concerned.

Could the behaviour problems in children be due to a higher state of consciousness that they cannot cope with?

I do not think this is the only reason. You see, there is a scale of plus, minus and balance, zero. Plus represents evolution, minus represents involution, regression, mental retardation, not able to cope, not able to manage situations because we are lagging behind; this is the minus side. There is the plus side also: hyperactivity, hyperconscious awareness, or a high

conscious awareness, and because of this state, they live in a different reality, with a different understanding. They cannot understand people around them. They don't have the concept of normal; it is either higher or lower.

Each one of us is, up to a stage, either on the plus side or the minus side, no one is exactly in the centre. If you critically observe yourselves objectively, then you will find that there is a trait to be either attracted to the positive side or towards the negative side. Only you can answer this for yourself: which side do you incline towards more? Each one of us, according to that inclination, acts, thinks, behaves and desires different things at different times. Then the performance becomes different, the attitude changes, everything changes. There are some who are on a greater scale, inclined towards one or the other side, and those people we call 'abnormal'.

We have to not only observe the behavioural pattern of a child, but also what kind of inclination they are showing in their normal life, and then try to find a solution. If they are on the minus side, then do this by encouraging them, using different means and methods, caring for them and trying to raise their mental awareness to the present level or to higher ones, trying to understand them and making them compatible with the environment around them. I am not saying change them; I am saying make them compatible and not to suppress their ingenuity by using harsh treatments.

In my understanding, the most appropriate and beneficial way would be to encourage and support their normal activity so that they can at least have recognition and awareness of themselves, and be able to face situations with faith in themselves, so that eventually they can be proud of themselves. But of course a lot of work has to be done in this area also. Maybe one day the opportunity will provide itself.

How can we settle a fight with a friend without drifting apart as a result?

There is a simple solution. When the fight is over, do not carry it with you. Let it be. Drifting apart happens when you carry

the frustration with you. You fought this morning, but you are still carrying the effect of the fight this evening. If you carry the impression of the fight tomorrow, then the day after it will give birth to more hatred and jealousy and you will drift apart. If you do fight with someone, in the next second look at them, smile and shake hands. Finish the fight and become friends again. We can fight ten times in a day, but also make friends ten times in the day. If you can develop this ability, that quality will be recognized by others as a virtue, as a strength, and people will appreciate you.

How can I control anger?

The easiest way to control anger is to practise shashankasana. This practice controls the adrenaline and then the aggression and anger vanish. Anyone who gets angry should do this asana at night and then go to sleep immediately afterwards. The anger will become controlled within a week.

How can I increase my height?

There are two things you can do. When I came to the ashram, my guru taught me two postures. One was sarvangasana, where the legs and trunk go up when you are lying down, and the other was tadasana. Both practices are very good for improving height. Practise sarvangasana first. Stay in the posture for at least two minutes, because when the neck is bent in this asana, it affects the thyroid gland, which is responsible for our physical growth. When there is a problem in its functioning either the body is swollen, which is the state of hypothyroid, or the body becomes thin, which is the state of hyperthyroid. So practise sarvangasana to regulate and maintain the thyroid gland. After this practice, lie on your back and rest for a while, then come to your feet for tadasana in which you should try to stretch as high as possible. The more you stretch, the greater the effect on your height.

Teenagers are much attracted by computers, music, sports, friends, etc. How can we bring them to yoga and spirituality?

One thing is important. We lack a role model in our life. When we have a proper role model to emulate, then our path is set before us. You were a child once upon a time, too. When you were a child, did you have anybody as your role model? No. You have children, too. Do your children have a role model today? No. If there are any role models, they are outside in the form of artists, actors, affluent people, and these role models are people who are caught up in their own web of confusion, stress and distress. Swami Satyananda once said, I am today what I am because I had a good example to follow in my life. His guru Swami Sivananda was his role model. I am lucky because my hero and my role model is my guru. In this way, if we all can have a role model, a hero with whom we identify and whose qualities we try to imbibe, then we will have a better direction in life. Put a child in a conflicting situation and he will begin to think, what would Rambo do in my situation, take out the gun and start shooting, and the child will do that, too.

If you have Sri Swamiji as role model and you begin to think, what would he do if he were in my situation, and you discover that he would smile, then you would also begin to smile. In life everyone needs a role model and therefore, give different opportunities to your children to discover their own role models. Let them participate in different activities; do not try to enforce your ideas upon them. There are many children at this program and they are all busy doing their own thing, but they are imbibing the environment, the energy, the feeling of this place.

A boy came to me yesterday called Kailash, aged nine. I came out of my room after the evening program and he was standing there. He said, "Hello, I have something for you." He gave me his wrist watch and said, "This is the most precious possession of my life, which I'm handing over to you." Does anything remain to be said? I don't think so. Why did Kailash, a young boy of nine, have the idea 'I want to give something

I hold precious and dear to me to a swami' he had maybe only seen once or twice before for a few hours? Something had gone on in him. Maybe somebody has become his role model too.

I was told about another little girl who was six-years-old. I had visited the children's class in the afternoon, and this six year old girl was not in the room. Remember her age. When we had all left the room, she came in and asked the teachers, "Has Swamiji come here? Can you tell me everything that he said?" She was so involved in her question, which reflected a keen interest to know what had transpired between me and the other children behind her back.

From where did her inclination come? From where did his inclination come? From some samskara which they have imbibed by being in close proximity with a good environment. Not only a good environment but also good people. Credit goes to their parents for having given them the opportunity to discover their own nature.

It is futile to think about how we can attract children to where our interests lie. You do not care about their interests so why should they care about your interests? When they want to go out and play with you, you say, "No I'm tired, tomorrow." And that is the answer they give you back when you tell them, "Come to yoga." "No, no, no, tomorrow." Because their image of you is as dictator. Parents are imposing their own views, their own ideas, their own interests and their own samskaras on the children. But if you can be a friend to them and not a governing father, if you can be a support to them and not a heavy duty mother, and develop and nurture friendship between the two of you, then you will be giving them the opportunity to choose their own direction in life.

Definitely young people have to be exposed to art and science. If they like computers, encourage them. If they like music, encourage them. If they like painting and drawing, and sports and friends, encourage them. When they know that you support them, they will listen to you and they will obey

you too. Only give your children the opportunity to grow in the right direction and protect them from evil influences. Just as you would look after a sprout and protect it from harm, in the same manner take care of your children and protect them from harm. Support them and allow them to discover their own creativity and to live their own destiny. In that way, in friendly association with your children you will be able to guide them to become a better human being.

Would you please talk about sankalpa and the sankalpas used with children? How can we avoid projecting our own desires onto children and how can we help them to be aware of the difficulties in relationships with parents?

Swami Sivananda used to say that children are lumps of clay and you can mold them into any way you want them to be. This is true, but unfortunately, we have not been moulded properly and we lack the understanding of how to mould others properly. Although Swami Sivananda's statement is correct, we cannot apply it. Instead of working with children, as a first step, I would recommend that parents work with themselves. It is the general tendency for parents to become the judge, jury and executioner of their children whenever they commit any kind of action. The child always sees the parents as the authority. The parents are the authority figures and the child is always a victim of that authority. No matter how much you may love your child, that image is there.

The first point yoga suggests is that you should change yourself and try to become a friend to your child. Friendship has a very big influence on the life of a person and the life of a child. Children will listen to and follow what other children say because there is no barrier; they see each other as equals. Even when they are grown up, the concept of equality between friends matures. You remain friends with those who were your friends in childhood and you avoid those people whom you placed on the pedestal of authority. If you see your high school teacher walking down the road, you will avoid that teacher if you can. If there is no way of avoiding the teacher,

you will say hello, but your legs will be shaking. So the first effort parents have to make is to become friends with their children.

Secondly, after you have become friends with your children you have to encourage them to express their positive nature. As an example, a true story comes to mind about a family who had a small child. Whenever the parents wanted to go to the movies they would tell the child a lie, not that they were going to the movies. But intuitively the child knew that his parents were hiding something from him and he began to rebel against their instructions. It was an intuitive response. Adults function at the level of intellect, but children function at the level of intuition. Therefore, they are able to pick up many things intuitively which adults try to hide from them intellectually. They know when someone is telling them a lie and they know when somebody is telling them the truth. They know when somebody is trying to control them and they know when somebody is trying to let them be free. Their responses are different, their expressions are different, their eyes are different, their smiles are different in every situation.

Once you have become friends with your child, if you are able to encourage them to express their feelings by being truthful with them, then you do not need to have a sankalpa especially modified or made for children because they learn by example. We all learn by example, but we cannot sustain the example in our lives for long due to our conditioning, or our belief, or our lifestyle, whatever the mentality, whatever the reason. But children learn by example, and they live by example. So being truthful to your child will automatically bring out the best in them.

Thirdly, if you feel the child is inhibited in some areas of his nature or personality, such as shyness or an inability to interact with other children of the same age group, having difficulties relating to people, having some form of insecurity or inhibition, having difficulties with study, with concentration, retention and memory, then you can begin with simple sankalpas which can encourage positive expression in the

child's life. One very broad and basic sankalpa which we generally give to little children is, "I am creative." It is very simple. Give your child this sankalpa and also give your child the opportunity to become creative in life, because it is no use giving a sankalpa without giving the opportunity. If you give a sankalpa, then you also have to give the right opportunity.

So, from my perspective, it is the parents who have to do the hard work, not the children. Children simply have to be encouraged to express themselves.

Rishi Hridayananda: Sankalpa is one of the greatest things that we can do for ourselves. As parents we hold the key to this new generation in our hands and in our hearts. Our children follow everything we do and say, their ears are highly tuned to how we act. When your children are fifty, sixty or seventy years of age they will be acting just like you. How do I know? Because I do it myself.

The best thing you can do for your children is to teach them yoga nidra and use our guru, Swami Niranjanananda, as the greatest example for your inspiration. Turn the yoga nidra cassette on in the evening when you come back from work or school. Let your children hear it and see you practising it. That is the way to teach them. If you can do that, then your children will grow and learn and they will be inspired to practise yoga at an older age. When they have children they will be doing it as well.

Sankalpa is perhaps the greatest seed that we can place in our inner consciousness. It comes to fruition extremely quickly. If you put your heart and mind to the task, then it becomes easy because it is also enjoyable. Children love it and it helps them to pass their exams.

Swami Yogabhakti: Sankalpa is certainly the absolute weapon against anxiety and fear. When children are preparing for exams, for instance, and also hearing about life as adults present it, about how hopeless the world is today, about unemployment and not being able to find a job even with a degree, then sankalpa is very powerful. You tell the children

that if they are truly who they are, they will find their place under the sun, whatever the conditions, whatever the parents. If you tell them to be confident and repeat “I know I can do it. I know I will succeed”, they will succeed. If you give children self-confidence through a sankalpa, then they will find out who they are and what they have to do, and they will manage throughout life.

We have been taught by our guru that a person has to choose their own sankalpa. Therefore, we must explain to school children of about eight to eleven years that they have to select their own sankalpa, keeping in mind the fact that they are endowed with light inside. Then they should close their eyes and listen to the tiny little voice telling them the right little sentence, which they will repeat in their heart. Usually, when children are told to close their eyes and listen to that key sentence or that strong word, their faces light up because they hear the little voice inside dictating the sankalpa. That is how we deal with sankalpa in the classroom at school.

Dr Rishi Vivekananda: When our youngest son was three or four he was always running onto the road. We had no fence around the house and were very worried about him. So at night when he was asleep I would go and whisper in his ear, “Now, Peter, when you come to the edge of the road you must stop and make sure there are no cars coming.” I said this three times for about a week. The sankalpa went into his unconscious mind and may have saved his life because he is still alive. After a week he would come running across the footpath and just stop at the side of the road and look down at his feet. He could not work out why his feet had stopped. That is sankalpa!

A Special Needs Student

My Lucky Star



Mandala and poem by Rita, 17 years, pregnant, 'Learning Disabled' (photocopy coloured with pens and pencils)

MY OWN MANDALA

Today we have a rainy cold Tuesday.
I'm sitting here in school colouring my mandala.
I am thinking about a lot of things.

When I got you, you looked like nothing. You were all white.
You were lacking the colour.
Only with the colour you became alive.
Now day by day you become more beautiful.
I will give you the title: "My Lucky Star."

I believe in God and in miracles
and this picture gives me this feeling.
This picture also gives me the feeling, that by looking at it
for a long time, you are somewhere else.
Whenever I look at this picture, I feel great, because
I know that I have created this mandala all by myself.

Special Needs Education

9

Yogain Special Needs Education: What's so Special about it?

Dr Swami Chandrajyoti Saraswati

The times are changing. The winter of materialism is going and the spring of bhakti is coming.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Specialty No. 1: As a transformative nucleus of society

The first 'specialty' of Special Needs Education is its quality of being a transformative nucleus for society. On one side, special needs education is a very difficult area of work because, due to its very extreme conditions of so-called 'handicaps', 'disabilities', 'dysfunctions' and 'impairments', deteriorating processes of society, for example materialism, hedonism and segregation, are often bound to culminate here. But on the other side, the pressure which builds up at these outskirts of society can function as a powerful motor of transformation for a 'society in need' – the excluded and left behind ones then often become the first to see the dawn of a new morning.

The best example of this very strong transformative force is *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. This was adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 – a document which in this very specialized subject area was, and still is, far ahead of the necessary changes in the mainstream of society. There, three hundred participants representing ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organizations met to reaffirm not

only the right to education of every individual as enshrined in the 1948 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', but to renew the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences. In this meeting the assembled representatives considered in detail the fundamental policy shifts required to leave the 2,000 year-old history of 'segregation-based' special needs education behind and to promote instead the new approach of 'inclusive education'. By worldwide consensus, they declared a document which upheld the principle of inclusion, by recognition of the need to work towards 'schools for all: institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs' (UNESCO 1994, iii).

Specialty No. 2: As a storehouse of transformative tools

The second 'specialty' of Special Needs Education is its 'readiness' to apply new methods, which are appropriate to fulfil the necessary requirements in all its 'classic' areas: mental retardation, learning disabilities, behaviour disorders, communication and language disorders, hearing and visual impairment, physical and health impairments, severe handicaps as well as gifted and talented children. This readiness is often constrained, because most of the far-reaching official statements, which declare change, never give concrete hints *how* this change can be put into practice at the educational grassroots level.

Here yoga, as an ancient as well as modern science of life, plays an important role as it can provide a storehouse of transformative tools which – and this is of utmost importance – not only represent technical aids, but are derived from an ancient philosophical paradigm that is in line with the overall pedagogical view of an individualized, child-centred approach combined with equality, dignity and inclusion.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the application of Yoga in Special Needs Education and its related fields has

already been the subject of scientific evaluation in different aspects:

- **fear and anxiety in children** (*Platania-Solazzo et al. 1992, Telles et al. 1997*)
 - i) *applied yogic techniques*: relaxation, awareness exercises, physical postures (asana)
 - ii) *effect of yogic training*: significant decreases in irregular breath patterns and resting heart rate; decreases in self-reported anxiety and in anxious behaviour; decreases in cortisol levels
- **aggression and violence in teenage boys** (*Luedtke 2000*)
 - i) *applied yogic techniques*: relaxation (yoga nidra), visualization and art therapy (mandala)
 - ii) *effect of yogic training*: decrease of anti-social behaviour, improvement of self-esteem
- **learning disabilities in children** (*Telles et al. 1993, Sumar 1998*)
 - i) *applied yogic techniques*: physical postures (asana), regulation of breathing (pranayama), maintenance of silence (mouna), visual focusing exercises (trataka)
 - ii) *effect of yogic training*: significant increase in static motor performance (control of body and mental concentration); improvement of attention span and memory
- **mental retardation in children** (*Uma et al. 1989, Sumar 1998*)
 - i) *applied yogic techniques*: physical postures (asana, esp. surya namaskara), loosening exercises (sithilikarana vyayama), breathing exercises (pranayama), meditation
 - ii) *effect of yogic training*: highly significant improvement in IQ and social adaptation parameters; increase in emotional stability and self-esteem
- **physical impairment in children** (*Sumar 1998*)
 - i) *applied yogic techniques*: physical postures (asana), regulation of breathing (pranayama), relaxation
 - ii) *effect of yogic training*: improvement of flexibility and motor control.

Specialty No. 3: As an integrative capacity on individual and global levels

In our context, the science of yoga has two important qualities: Firstly, it ‘embodies’ in its techniques an integrative capacity and secondly, it has the ability to ‘inspire’ that particular science in which its techniques are applied.

Therefore, the third ‘specialty’ of Special Needs Education is the application of yoga in its support of the unfolding of ‘education for all’ on all of the denoted levels:

- at the **intra-personal** level: by the integration of head, hand and heart of *every* child
- at the **inter-personal** level: by the integrated efforts of children, parents, professional educators and community workers towards schools for *all*
- at the **national** level: by encouraging and facilitating the integration of adopting as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education and of establishing decentralized and participatory mechanisms for planning, monitoring and evaluating educational provision for children with special educational needs
- at the **international** and **global** level: by integrating the plans of governments, specialized agencies and global organizations to ensure that special needs education forms part of discussions dealing with education for all in various forums and stimulates the academic community to strengthen research and networking and to establish regional centres of information and documentation for inclusive education.

To sum up the answer to our question “What’s so special about Yoga in Special Needs Education?”, we can finally say that yoga provides an important means to build up a school system, where pedagogical and therapeutic curricula can be adapted to the children’s individual needs and not viceversa where children are uniformly adapted to the school’s needs.

10

A Class for Special Needs Children

Swami Savitananda Saraswati

I had the great opportunity to do some yoga work with disabled children in various institutions, where they either lived full-time or attended on a daily basis.

The physical, mental and emotional states of these children varied immensely, yet there was something endearing about them all. I felt that they endured a lot of suffering, not only in a physical way because of their disabilities, but for those who had difficulties in communication like being unable to speak or being understood, it seemed particularly frustrating. Many of these children were permanently given drugs to calm their emotions or to treat other problems, like epilepsy, and they were not without side effects, like dullness and lethargy. Some groups of children were relatively mobile and mentally bright, so they could, after some practice, even do the sequence of asanas known as surya namaskara, the movements of which many people who are not disabled have trouble in coordinating! We did not try to make the children perfect in the postures, but rather encouraged them all to join in and have fun whilst making an effort to move their bodies actively and imitate the teachers.

Group participation

We conducted these classes with all the students placed in a circle, and the school teachers and helpers, as well as the yoga teachers, spaced in between the children so that immediate

assistance could be given to those needing help, and the students could have eye contact with other people and not be isolated. The children enjoyed this. It was like a game for them. Some children who were withdrawn were encouraged to sit in the circle like everyone else even if they did not join in with the practices. However, it seemed to me that they knew exactly what was going on and after a period of time some of them would suddenly become extrovert and do the practices exactly right as they had been watching all the time. We could never underestimate the level of understanding of these children even if, superficially, they seemed ‘not there’.

Asana

Many of the asanas were done while standing in a circle holding hands which helped all the children to interact with others and the more able ones to help the others, especially where balance was required as many of them had trouble in simply standing up straight. Those asanas helped to increase balance, improve posture and flexibility of the spine, arms and legs.

We used imagination and sounds to stimulate their interest more. For example, doing kati chakrasana was likened to washing one’s clothes in a washing machine with the sound ‘whoosh, whoosh’ with each turn. Then we would bend over and touch our toes, doing pada hastasana, and pick up our clothes and stretch up into tadasana to hang them on the clothes line.

Another favourite asana, rajju karshanasana, was ‘ringing the bell’, where everyone stood in a circle holding each other’s hands. They would lift their arms up to pull an imaginary rope and then lower the arms quickly, at the same time going down into a squat and saying ‘ding, dong’ loudly. This is quite difficult to do and the school teachers were pleased about the children’s increased coordination of body and mind displayed when doing this asana.

Tiryaka tadasana was good for stretching and balancing. We did it by imagining that we were wind-blown trees and

making the noise of the wind. Another standing asana involved holding each other's hands and trying to balance on one foot, which is not easy for children or adults, without their problems, but is very good for developing coordination and balancing the nervous system.

Sitting asanas included pawanmuktasana part one and rowing the boat and churning the mill. Rowing the boat was enjoyed by singing "Row, row, row your boat" and joining hands and rowing together. This helped the slow children to be stimulated and join in. Individual assistance was needed in many cases and if there were enough school staff in the class, it could work well to stimulate those lesser able students to do more. We did not try to force the children to co-operate, but made the class so enjoyable that they would be encouraged to join in.

Other asanas we used were pawanmuktasana part two for the digestion, legs and abdomen, and also marjari-asana and vyaghrasana for coordination and the back and spine. Parvatasana was good for stretching the legs and also to bring a rich supply of blood to the brain which is very important for stimulating the brain. The students enjoyed doing simhasana, the lion's pose, and this was very helpful for improving their speech capacities, for releasing pent-up emotions and relieving ear, nose and throat ailments.

Pranayama

We know that breathing normally through the nose stimulates the brain, so as the majority of these children are mouth breathers, this further compounded their mental inadequacies. Many of them had problems with excess mucus in their bodies due to bad diet, drugs, allergies and other factors.

The practice of deep breathing through the nose while sitting was useful for relaxation and stimulating the brain, and some of the more able students could learn simplified nadi shodhana which was even more effective. Abdominal breathing lying on the back with hands on the abdomen was taught

for those who were able to perceive it, and everyone would enjoy making the noise of a bee in practising bhrāmari which helped to relax the brain, diminish anger and frustration, and improve the condition of ears, nose and throat which were commonly troublesome.

Relaxation

The best relaxation technique for these students was the communal singing of kirtan; even the most disabled children's eyes lit up when the harmonium was brought out along with percussion instruments. Here, they had an opportunity to express themselves in singing (or at least making a happy sound) as well as rhythm, by clapping hands or playing an instrument. This also improved their coordination between mind and body and released emotional tension. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly and everyone could join in, in some way. This was a good way to end the class and leave them relaxed and happy. If the group was particularly dissipated and unruly at the beginning of the class, we used kirtan then to quieten them down in preparation for the other practices.

Formal relaxation in shavasana was used with brevity and imagination as often they were quite restless. We did not know how much of the speaking through the practice was understood by the children, but the tone of voice and rhythm of the words left them relaxed and refreshed.

Short relaxation performed while in shashankasana was very useful for calming the mind and energy, reducing anger and emotional extremes, and bringing a rich supply of blood to the head to stimulate the brain. This practice could be used any time during the class, particularly to quieten the children.

Other methods

Some of the children had such extreme physical problems that they were unable to move very much, or even to sit up or walk or talk – things we take for granted. These children

were confined to bed or wheelchairs and many had physical deformities that were painful and limiting for their bodily expression, even if they may have been relatively mentally alert. With these children we had to work on a one-to-one basis in small groups. At the same time we were training the staff to be able to continue working with them in our absence, if possible on a daily basis, so that the children would get the most benefit from yoga.

In these cases we very gently manipulated parts of their body in yogic movements. This was mostly confined to working with the joints as in pawanmuktasana part one whilst the child was lying on a mattress on the floor. We were careful not to cause them pain which they could communicate through their eyes, and we worked very slowly without forcing their bodies in any way. This helped to release physical tension and stimulate free flow of prana throughout their bodies. It was a slow process because some of their limbs were as tense as steel rods, but it was worthwhile in the long-term if they could become more relaxed and their bodily systems could function better.

For them relaxation consisted of us singing slow kirtan whilst gently massaging or stroking their bodies so they would feel that human contact and caring. We also played soothing kirtan cassettes whilst doing the asanas with them which helped them to relax more and surrender to the movements.

The effect of mantra was very powerful for relaxing and centring all the children and we practised a loud *Aum* chanting with them which also benefited their speech, expression and throat problems.

Love

It was a joy to teach yoga to these children as they had no intellectual barriers to break through. They were accepting of us and the yoga and as soon as we entered the room or school for classes they would come running over to us for embraces, welcoming us to the class. This showed me that

they enjoyed the yoga and obviously realized that they felt better from doing it.

The teachers gained more knowledge of the children's capabilities through seeing them practise yoga and reported that they functioned better and in a more relaxed manner after the yoga class. So we encouraged them to learn to instruct yoga themselves so they could give the children that uplifting experience every day and reap the benefits as well. These teachers were working in very demanding and stressful conditions, so in some situations we were able to give them relaxation (yoga nidra) for themselves and encouraged them to practise yoga for greater understanding and wellbeing.

11

Yoga Nidra for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children

Swami Nirmalratna Saraswati

In 1987, my work as a classroom teacher in the junior school of Van Asch College for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children, Christchurch, New Zealand, combined my studies in early childhood education, a few years classroom teaching and, most valuable of all, my years of sannyasa life. I found myself surrounded by children who had everything that the average hearing children had and more – deafness, in varying degrees from severe to profound. It was as if every aspect of human nature within these young children was magnified; every gram of sweetness, gentleness, innocence, eagerness to discover and learn and to be loved, as well as aggression, frustration, impatience, naughtiness – all magnified by their deafness or hearing impairments.

This was my first teaching experience with deaf children. I thought about the ease of communication experienced when interacting with normal-hearing children. The sharing of a whispered secret, a game to guess the mysterious sounds coming from inside a sealed box, a walk in a park or in bush land to seek out the sounds of nature, in a crunch of snow, in the rustling of leaves, in a bird's song, in the roaring sea. All the gentle and raucous sounds existing in our auditory world would not be part of the deaf child's experience.

I considered the immediately obvious difficulties that would arise upon diagnosis of deafness in a tiny child. The emotional upsets in family and social life, physiological strains

and tensions when faced with developing tone, pitch and volume for 'normal speech', the pent-up and suppressed energy that comes with coping in a world that is built to support and encourage the 'normal person, etc. My mind began to look at what the ancient science of yoga had to offer these children.

Could yoga be adapted?

In what ways could yoga practices contribute to the full expression of the potential talents inherent in these deaf children? My yoga teaching experiences had shown me that, for children with pent-up feelings of anger and aggression, for children under pressure to achieve and conform, for emotionally distressed children and those coming from emotionally charged home environments, the combined physical movements of yoga asanas and the progressive yoga relaxation practices are most appropriate and highly beneficial. Scientific research has shown that simple yoga nidra techniques help to induce deep relaxation, allowing the negative impressions stored in the unconscious mind a chance to come to the surface and dissipate.

The obvious initial step seemed to be yoga nidra so as to induce some degree of mental, emotional and physical relaxation within the child. Swami Satyananda's system of yoga nidra relies on the ability to hear the instructions. So, to adapt it for deaf children, alternatives to verbal and auditory media of instruction were required. I remembered Sri Swamiji's talk about 'nyasa', the ancient tantric practice from which he constructed the present system of yoga nidra.

In the practice of nyasa the yogi adopted a meditation posture and rotated the consciousness systematically through all parts of the body. This practice was to instil higher body awareness for meditation practices. As each part of the body was named and then visualized or touched, a specific mantra was placed in that body part. From the technique in nyasa of physically touching each body part, I developed the idea of using the sense of touch as the means to introduce yoga nidra instructions to the deaf children.

Initial steps for yoga nidra

The first yoga nidra practices taught at Van Asch were with two nine year-old girls, both profoundly deaf. Their classroom teacher had heard that I taught yoga and asked if I would give Cher and Minnie some relaxation practices. Minnie was having great difficulty in her speech therapy classes because her throat was 'too tight', no deep sounds could be produced in her voice box. Cher had similar problems but not to the same degree. When approached with this request, my first thoughts were to teach yoga nidra, *simhasana* (lion pose), and some simple pranayama. So, instead of their usual speech therapy classes, Minnie and Cher were sent to me three times per week for relaxation practices.

The initial yoga nidra class was a very simple practice. In turn, both girls adopted a cross-legged sitting posture in front of me. I explained the instructions in my very limited sign language and demonstrated the technique to each girl personally with the touch-signs, while the other watched intently. Their keen visual perception did not miss any movements and both were able to grasp the practice very quickly. Before they closed their eyes to begin, I gave the following instructions using Australasian sign-language:

Sit in this cross-legged posture, (padmasana if possible).

Keep your body still. Do not move your body.

When we begin, close your eyes and keep your eyes closed until the end of the practice.

I will touch different parts of your body, right hand, elbow, shoulder, side of waist, hip, thigh, knee, ankle, foot and then the corresponding parts on the left side of the body, with my hand.

Each time I touch a part you must:

- i) say the name of that part to yourself
- ii) see that part inside your head, like a picture, and
- iii) feel that part relax.

When the practice is finished I will touch your forehead three times. Then slowly move your arms and legs and stretch your body. Lastly, open your eyes.

After taking personal instructions and demonstrations from me, Minnie and Cher practised upon each other several times. Having practised in the cross-legged posture, progressively adding more body parts (buttocks, back, shoulders, abdomen, navel, chest, neck, face, eyes, ears, cheeks, nose, lips, chin, etc.), I then demonstrated shavasana. Yoga nidra practice from then on was mostly given in shavasana.

Extending the practices

Subsequent yoga nidra practices were extended to include breath awareness in nostrils, throat, chest, navel centre and abdomen. Yogic breath was also introduced. It was very necessary to teach breath awareness in these specific body parts as separate practices before including them in yoga nidra. The children need to know, need to understand, how to do the breathing practices before you include them in the yoga nidra session. In this way you will not overload them with too many new instructions at one time. To be able to teach the breathing practices – thoracic, abdominal and yogic breathing – the instructor should know the practices well and be able to give simple sign-language demonstrations for each practice.

So as not to make the yoga nidra too involved or too long, only one type of breath awareness was given per session. Before every yoga nidra practice, instructions were given as simply and clearly as possible as to what the practice would include. In this way the children knew exactly what to do when the touch-signs were given by the instructor. For example, when breath awareness was to be part of the yoga nidra, the children were told that after body rotation had been completed the instructor would lightly stroke the nose for nostril breath, or the chest for thoracic breath, or from chest to abdomen for yogic breath. The children had been taught that the breath awareness was to begin in the appropriate body part as soon as the touch-sign was given and was to continue there until that touch-sign was repeated.

Games of visualization had been made up during other classroom times so the children were well versed in the procedure before it was incorporated into the yoga nidra practice. During these games each child decided on five to ten or more items that they wanted to see inside their head. With the inner gaze directed to the eyebrow centre (in shambhavi mudra), the child silently named his listed items in correct order as he visualized them one by one.

When visualizations were included in yoga nidra, they always came after the breath awareness section or after body rotation, depending on which of these sections were in the yoga nidra practice. To indicate the beginning of the visualization section the instructor's palms pressed lightly onto the crown of the student's head. Then the children knew to begin visualizing the numerous pictures already chosen in their classroom visualization games.

After the visualizations had been worked through, the children were taught to finish the yoga nidra practice. A simple sankalpa, a resolve, can be added to the yoga nidra if appropriate. For my situation and students, the best time for the sankalpa was just before the children began to stretch their body at the end of the practice.

The children in the junior school were also taught yoga nidra, with the initial demonstrations and instructions explained in a similar manner to those for Minnie and Cher. All the young children, six and seven years old, became expert instructors and practitioners in a few short lessons. They checked and corrected each other's practice until every child knew exactly what to do. Extra body parts were added by the children, and they even took their yoga nidra into the playground to share with their friends from other classrooms. In the junior school the yoga nidra became part of the daily routine either before or just after lunch, for ten minutes.

The exact application of yoga nidra techniques depends largely on the individual's physical, mental, emotional (and spiritual) needs. You will appreciate the need of the deaf to be constantly visually alert so as to communicate with each

other and those people they come in contact with. Sign language, facial and body gestures, mime and lip reading are some aspects of total communication for the deaf and hearing impaired, and they all place heavy demands on visual perception. The yoga nidra practices at Van Asch School gave the children an opportunity to switch off from the external visual world, thereby allowing those centres in the brain a chance to rest with conscious awareness. On this point alone the yoga nidra practices were highly valuable.

The children also displayed facial expressions of tranquillity and calmness, relaxation of body parts, especially in the shoulders and hands, a stillness and quietness after the practices which other teachers commented on. One teacher told me after observing the pre-school children in their yoga nidra practice with each other as instructors, "I never would have believed it was possible for those dear, horrid little monsters to be so calm, relaxed and gentle with each other. It is the nicest experience I've seen in all my years at this school. Thank you."

No barriers

Other yoga practices were taught to Minnie and Cher, especially some simple pranayama, which I believe have an important role to play in the speech therapy practices for the deaf and hearing impaired. After a few lessons of yoga nidra, simple asanas and pranayama including the practices of *bhramari* (humming bee breath), and *simhasana*, both girls were producing deep, loud and strong sounds from their voice boxes. Positive and quick results were obviously apparent to the girls. They certainly noticed their new abilities in sound production without any adult telling them. Other children may respond more slowly.

The potential for yoga in many areas of education for the deaf and hearing impaired is waiting to be explored. This yoga nidra technique was only a trial run to see what was possible, but I felt that we had cut through a barrier between the outer world of auditory sense perception and the inner realms

of the hearing impaired. The children were 'hearing' my instructions through the non-verbal language of touch. The problems caused by the absence of sound were bypassed. For this reason the future education of hearing-handicapped (and 'normal') children is certain to benefit greatly by integrating the science of yoga into all aspects of curriculum study. All that is required are open-minded school principals and staff who are willing to implement the yogic techniques through educators well versed in the science of yoga.

12

Getting in Touch, with Adya

Rama Rane

The following case study presents the experience of Adya, an autistic child who, with the help of yoga, learns to deal with chronic disease by 'getting in touch' with her self and her physical and emotional planes.

In February 1999, I walked into a circle of expectant faces in the sun soaked room of a special school for my yoga session, when I noticed her. Adya, a girl of about twelve years, pale and silent, frail and vulnerable with the shuttered look so characteristic of autistic individuals. Later I learned from her mother that she suffered from chronic anaemia and from a serious lung condition, which left her with very little energy to play or engage in activities with other children. Chronic colds and coughs, together with repeated attacks of fever, left Adya easily breathless, fatigued and exhausted.

Adya's mother was sceptical about the efficacy of yoga in dealing with such conditions yet, with hope in her heart, she requested me to take Adya as a student. That was the beginning of a very special association. The insights I gained during that time have helped me in yoga therapy applications for children with special needs.

Understanding autism

Autism is a little understood phenomenon. It is a developmental disorder of brain functions, now attributed to biological

factors. The exact causes are currently under investigation by researchers. Recent advances in modes of intervention have resulted in a greater percentage of autistic children able to attend school with normal children, and to live more or less independently in community settings. However, the majority remain severely handicapped in their ability to communicate and socialize with other people.

Prior to the 1990s autism occurred in about five children per ten thousand live births. Since then the rate has increased enormously, with figures as high as sixty per ten thousand. According to Bernard Rimland, founder of the Autism Society of America (ASA), autism 'is serious and worldwide'.¹

Michael Goldberg, MD, Dept of Neurology, UCSF Medical Center, Santiago, USA, considers autism as a syndrome rather than a disease.² It is probably a state of dysfunction induced in the brain by a dysregulated immune system, thought to affect central nervous system functions and the language and social skills area of the brain.

The syndrome possibly occurs in children with a genetic predisposition and is triggered by various stresses placed on the immune system. Children suffering from 'autistic syndrome' appear normal in the first 15–18 months of life, achieving normal motor milestones on schedule, appearing to have above average intelligence, and are affectionate until the onset of the problem. Then, without warning, in their pre-school years they cease to progress or begin to regress, becoming withdrawn and displaying various abnormal behaviours, often including 'soft' signs of neurological impairment.

Adya's background

At the age of three years ten months, Adya had shown signs of regression such as learning difficulties, problems communicating with other children, and laughing and grimacing to herself. The diagnosis was autism with delay in language development, basic conceptual mastery and mild delay in motor coordination. Treatment/therapy

involved special education, play, dance and other activities to progressively stimulate her physical development. Despite these efforts Adya seemed hypersensitive and frustrated. She was unable to express feelings, respond appropriately to other children or handle even mildly challenging situations such as boisterous talk or teasing, and would withdraw hurt. Although interested in art and music and craving participation, group involvement was difficult for her.

When Adya began yoga therapy in February 1999, aged twelve years, she was undergoing treatment for Auto Immune Haemolytic Anaemia (AIHA), detected at six years, and B/L Bronchiectasis, which developed in the eighth year. AIHA is a severe life threatening condition. Clinical features are pallor and jaundice with enlargement of the spleen. Corticosteroid therapy and splenectomy constitute some of the modalities for treatment.³ Bronchiectasis is a chronic disease of the lung. Symptoms are chronic cough and anorexia, failure to thrive and weight loss. Management is with antibiotics and postural drainage by physiotherapy. As the disease is irreversible, this treatment can only control infection and prevent further damage. Surgical removal of the affected lobe is recommended in severe cases.⁴ All the above clinical features were present in Adya's case.

Adya's main treatment was postural drainage, steam inhalation plus antibiotics and steroids, as well as regular monthly tests, which in January 1999 and on 19 February 1999 indicated severe anaemia. Jaundice had set in, appetite was poor and Adya complained of pains in the legs and arms and general weakness. Surgery had been recommended for removal of the bronchiectatic lobe.

On 23 February 1999, yoga intervention began with a basic program focusing on respiratory functions. Within a month changes were noted. The haemolysis was in check from February. A gradual improvement in the respiratory condition was noted by the mother from March. At the end of March the worst attack lasting two days was reduced with a higher dosage of antibiotics but without steroids.

In the second week of April 1999, surgery for removal of the bronchiectatic lobe was scheduled. The yoga program was reviewed and shatkarmas included. The focus was on cleansing, draining the lungs and improving ventilation through postures, movement, breathing and guided imagery.

Sensational recovery

Adya was admitted for surgery on 27 June 1999. However, on 3 July, after treatment with antibiotics and steroids, she was discharged without surgery. On the basis of test reports and scans taken as a preliminary to the scheduled surgery, the attending surgeon opined that there was no longer evidence to warrant surgery. A suggestion to carry out a splenectomy was rejected by Adya's parents. Steroids were administered for one month.

Her mother observed that within the next three weeks Adya's health stabilized, her appetite improved, and she looked healthy. By the beginning of September, Adya was eating a more varied diet, which she could not do earlier due to dietary restrictions. She experienced greater tolerance for exertion with no fatigue in the mornings. Antibiotics were reduced by fifty percent. There was improvement in communication abilities, an increased interest in academics, dance and music and she appeared more confident.

From 2nd September 1999 until the end of December 2000, Adya's yoga program focused on strengthening immunity and preventing respiratory infections; improving blood circulation to the brain and increasing energy levels; toning the liver and spleen; dealing with emotions and improving communication, speech and listening skills; as well as deepening self-awareness.

Current status

Adya has attained normal physical development. Her condition continues to be stable with respect to haemolysis and bronchiectasis with no major episodes of illness. The frequency of medication (antibiotics) has reduced. No steroids have been

given since December 1999. This young girl is now able to deal with haemolysis on her own, without medication. Yoga has become a regular part of her daily life, while pursuing functional academic skills at a special school, along with art and vocational training. Her interests and activities have grown in scope and depth. Her moods are sunnier and she is involved with friends.

Discussion

It is apparent that Adya succeeded in managing conditions that were chronic, severe and debilitating to the extent that there was no evidence of worsening and surgery was avoided, a feat considered sensational by her medical team and family. After this initial success with disease and exhaustion, she continues to progress towards a state of wellbeing and growth.

We may never fully unravel the truth that underlies the processes and mechanics of healing, but it is clear that Adya's yoga program released forces that contributed to her healing. Although I cannot say with certainty, I believe that Adya's guided visualization practice, a modified form of yoga nidra as taught by the Bihar School of Yoga, was the key to her healing process as it opened a door to the source of her difficulties – autism.

While Adya's auto-immune dysfunction might be related to 'autistic syndrome', her emotional condition was intrinsic to it. Her inability to convey feelings or respond appropriately to emotional stimuli, especially when provoked to anger, led to depression and to introversion which in turn would reduce her immunity, worsen the infection in the lungs and trigger haemolysis. Her psycho-social difficulties aggravated her frustration.

Effects of the yoga practices

In this discussion the focus is on the possible benefits that Adya might have derived from specific practices and the yoga program as a whole. The observations presented are based on a systematic daily record of Adya's daily yoga practice and

variations in her condition that were closely monitored by her mother. The practice program was evaluated periodically, varying from twice a week to once a month, according to the severity of the problem and need for intervention. Its effectiveness was assessed in terms of relief from symptoms of lung infection, anorexia, pallor and jaundice; and improvement in general health indicators such as appetite and digestion, growth, bowel movement, sleep, emotional state, stamina and exertion tolerance.

In the initial stages when Adya's condition was acute, clinical tests gave an indication of the changes happening. Later, self-assessment by the child, subjective information by the parents, as well as my own observations contributed to a more complete understanding of Adya's progress.

The yoga practices taught were based mainly on the teachings of Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar,⁵ with a few exceptions drawn from the teachings of Yogacharya Janakiraman, a student of Swami Gitananda of Anand Ashram, Pondicherry. Whenever required, the practices were slightly modified to suit her needs and capacity. I believe that all the practices contributed to the relief she gained from the severity of her original condition. Listed below are some of the practices considered to be most effective in bringing about her significant improvement.

1. Shatkarma: laghoo shankhaprakshalana, kunjla, neti
2. Asana: vajrasana, variations of vajrasana, janu pranamasana, ushtrasana, simhagarjanasana; nikunjasana; surya namaskara; inverted positions, e.g. vipareeta karani mudra
3. Pranayama: bhastrika pranayama, nadi shodhana (without kumbhaka, retention)
4. Guided visualization in shavasana.

Shatkarma

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana toned the digestive organs, particularly the liver, regulated bowel movements and improved appetite. After this practice Adya slept well and was inclined to be more peaceful and relaxed. Initially, it was

practised daily for one week, then later, when the condition was stable, once every weekend.

Kunjai induced strong muscular contractions of the diaphragm and the chest walls, eliminating infected secretions and mucus from the lungs. As the basal lobes of the lungs were affected, kunjai was very helpful in improving drainage, reducing the severity of the initial infection and in preventing further aggravation of bronchiectasis. By eliminating excess bile and toning the liver and spleen, jaundice was controlled. Initially, practised daily for about ten days, now it is practised whenever the condition is aggravated or once every ten days. Kunjai might have been one of the most important practices instrumental in releasing the pent-up feelings of hurt and anger underlying Adya's frustration and depression. After the initial phase of intense shatkarma practices, she seemed more energetic and found it easier to pursue the other yoga practices.

Neti, along with kunjai, was helpful in reducing and controlling the infection. Colds were arrested at the start of infection, which helped to prevent infection in the lungs from worsening, thus awakening the potential for improvements in Adya's respiratory condition.

Asana

Vajrasana strengthened and corrected weaknesses in the lower limbs and general body posture and improved digestion.

Junkna pranamasana increased circulation to the brain, induced calm and was helpful in reducing anxiety.

Ushtrasana stretched the abdominal organs and opened up the chest. Together with abdominal breathing, this facilitated rhythmic expansion and contraction of the lower lobes of the lungs, giving the added beneficial effects of deep abdominal breathing. Both postures were useful in improving drainage and ventilation of the lungs, and digestive functions.

Nikunjāsana (utthan pristhasana, lizard pose) was found to be very effective in draining the upper lobes of the lungs, easing congestion and providing immediate relief when

breathing became difficult. In combination with junkna pranamasana it brought about significant improvement in Adya's condition even when the infection was severe. It was much appreciated by physiotherapists during her hospitalization.

Surya namaskara postures combined with breath awareness improved motor coordination and general awareness. It was particularly effective in improving digestive functions, toning the liver and spleen, increasing appetite, reducing fatigue and building up stamina and tolerance for exertion. After commencing this practice, marked physiological changes were noted and Adya's resistance to infections improved significantly, possibly as a result of more balanced endocrine functions. It can be surmised that surya namaskara served as a mood elevator extricating her from depressive states.

Vipareeta karani mudra: While it is difficult to ascribe particular changes, this inverted practice was significant from the point of view of improving circulation to the brain, restoring balance to the endocrine system, stimulating the parathyroid, facilitating normal development of bones, relieving anxiety and encouraging abdominal breathing.

Simhagarjanasana relieved tension from the throat, chest and abdominal region, thus aiding deep breathing. It was a good method of teaching Adya to let go and vocalize her feelings, and it may have contributed to the improvement in clarity of speech and verbal expression.

Pranayama

Although yogic breathing was learnt and practised, it appeared that Adya did not understand the concept and found it difficult to do satisfactorily lying down. It was easier for her to use yogic breathing in other positions, such as vajrasana.

Bhastrika pranayama was taught to increase metabolic activity, tone and detoxify the liver, to eliminate secretions from the lungs and to strengthen respiratory functions through the action of the diaphragm.

Nadi shodhana (without kumbhaka) has become Adya's way of relieving fatigue during illness and moments of stress. This practice has clearly helped her to relieve anxiety and to increase and balance her energy levels.

Chidakasha dharana

Guided imagery in shavasana: Adya's response to visualization or guided imagery (based on yoga nidra) was in many ways quite astonishing. Little did I expect that she would be able to actually follow purely verbal instructions and conjure up vivid images as her difficulties lay in language and the ability to conceptualize. It was unmistakable from her statements and behaviour that guided visualization practices increased her self-awareness, her ability to surrender to the forces of life and to express emotions burdening her heart.

Perhaps the most momentous experience of her life was the cancellation of lung surgery. Guided imagery was the mainstay of her practice in the days immediately preceding and during hospitalization. It appears that the vision of a 'golden light' spreading an aura of protection saw her through the crises. She continues to draw sustenance from that 'cocoon' of light even today. We do not know whether Adya was always a visual thinker, but through this incident we glimpsed how appropriate techniques could unearth unrecognized potential.

The yoga sadhana as a whole appeared to reduce her vulnerability to extraneous forces such as the behaviour or responses of other children. An inward movement of consciousness empowered her to initiate and direct the healing. It enabled her to take charge of herself and be responsive in ways that seemed to make a change to her physical, mental and emotional health. Her parents, particularly her mother, encouraged and aided this growth from the depths of their being.

It is my belief that management of stress, a positive mental/emotional state and endocrinal balance kept the haemolysis in check. Against a background of relative stability of the immune system, practices for improving blood

circulation, lung functions and increasing energy levels were more effective, resulting in a general health improvement so essential for managing bronchiectasis. Can this be construed as a movement towards restoration of a modicum of balance to the derailed immune system? Only a systematic enquiry into more such cases can tell.

The insights I have gained from Adya indicate the potential for a wider application of yoga practices. The science of yoga may well contribute to a fresh approach to rehabilitation of autistic individuals, especially children.

Application of yoga therapy: the potential

It is heartening to note that researchers are now discussing and recommending measures that yogic practices are designed to achieve. Michael Goldberg cautions that medications to ‘calm’ the brain further shut down these areas, implying that alternative measures for improving blood flow and function are needed. According to him, clinical research is currently focusing on areas of dysfunction amenable to self-help therapy, indicative of a shift in approach to rehabilitation.⁶

Stephen M. Edelson states that vigorous exercise is a most under-utilized, yet effective treatment for autistic individuals and recommends it as a healthful alternative to drugs.⁷ Studies have shown it to be one of the best treatments for the depression and stereotypic behaviours of autistic children, as it reduces stress and anxiety as well as improving sleep, reaction time, and memory.

Temple Grandin, PhD, Assistant Professor, Colorado State University Fort Collins, Colorado, USA, shares her own experiences as an autistic individual, highlighting the importance of sensory stimulation and presents a most remarkable description of her ‘visual thinking’, which was “like playing different tapes in a video cassette recorder in my imagination.”⁸

The therapeutic benefits of visualization practices in yoga nidra are substantiated by scientific investigations reported in the book *Yoga Nidra* by Swami Satyananda Saraswati.⁹

My subsequent experiences with other children suffering from autism and neuro-cognitive disorders are in consonance with the belief that visual language is suited to some individuals with neuro-cognitive disorders. The results of a recent pilot study conducted for the Spastic Society of Karnataka, Bangalore, lends credence to this view.¹⁰

Further scientific investigations into the effect of yoga nidra and guided imagery on developmental disabilities may pave the way for wider applications of this yoga practice for therapeutic purposes.

Conclusion

Although constrained by her condition, Adya appears to be moving towards a more balanced state, more accepting of 'herself' and the world, more adept at handling stress and better equipped for directing her life. Occasionally, I do see her hover above the path in the garden of her 'mind space', not quite grounded. But there have been times when she has retraced her own footprints back to where she began.

As Adya's journey continues on from one layer of unfoldment to the next, from a diseased state to one of growth and enrichment, our understanding of the special needs of autistic individuals also continues to unfold.

(For references, see Bibliography)

Youth Empowerment

13

Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, Munger: Yoga Education by Children

Vikas Kumar

The Indian Government is currently considering ways of introducing yoga into upper primary schools. Here, I will explain how Swami Niranjanananda's experiment with the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal was initiated and became successful. Yoga is being incorporated into the educational curriculum in various institutions, but at the Munger ashram the goal is the overall development of the child.

In 1994, Swamiji gave a lecture at Notre Dame Academy, Munger, about how yoga could be incorporated into schools. The next day Swamiji was to leave for his European tour. We went to the station to see him off and he told us, "Now is the time to do something in Munger." We said, "Let's start teaching yoga in colleges." And Swamiji replied, "No, not in colleges, yoga should begin in schools, in small schools. There is still time to begin big work so let us make a small beginning."

Swamiji said that it was necessary to organize a parent-teacher meeting. We could not understand what we would achieve in yoga by a parent-teacher meeting, but we contacted the children from some known schools and called a meeting of the parents and the teachers. At the meeting it was decided that unless the parents realized the value of yoga the children would not learn. Furthermore, the teachers at the schools needed to be trained, otherwise they would not know the significance and the value of yoga.

When Swamiji returned from abroad he told us that an intellectual understanding of yoga would not do – knowledge must be based on practice. First, we showed the children around the ashram before calling the meeting of parents and teachers. In this way it was the children who brought their parents to the hall for the meeting. Thus we approached the parents through their children. On 23rd October 1994, we had the first meeting, which was a success. Then followed the yoga camp for parents and school teachers.

The parents who participated were impressed. However, there were a few prejudices. For example, parents were often apprehensive about exposing their children to yoga in case the children wanted to become sannyasis. Swamiji wants the layman, not the sannyasis, to teach yoga to the children so that the parents' apprehensions will be overcome and they will not hesitate to expose their children to yoga. So we made a point of not mentioning sannyasa in connection with this work.

Another obstacle is that people connect yoga with religion. However, in Munger we did not have much of a problem on this front as even we ourselves, after such a long association with yoga and the ashram, have not been converted to any religion as such. During the propagation of yoga we see that everybody thinks it is good for others, whether or not they do it themselves. So, we caught hold of the women and told them that their husbands should do yoga. The women made their husbands do yoga. When the parents realized that yoga brought them good physical health they became inspired. Today the parents are prepared to take yoga for themselves and their children. They realized it has a practical value and were no longer afraid that their children would become 'babajis'.

In April 1995, I started teaching yoga to five young children aged between eleven and thirteen. In September, we received an invitation from an institution to participate in a state level asana competition. I included two more children and began vigorous practice. However, there was an organizational hiccup and the parents forbade the group

from attending. We were deeply hurt. The trekker which had come to collect us was returned. The children started crying. I contacted Swamiji immediately and luckily he was available. He also agreed with the parents' decision and said, "If the organizers have not kept their word, you are also not obliged to keep your word." And he added, "Do not let the children be disheartened. I will arrange a competition for them." This gave us solace.

The very next day the children came to me and said, "We must set up our own Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and our own program." I replied, "This is the concept for which I tried to organize you. I wanted this idea to come from you." Then we contacted Swamiji and he readily permitted us to organize a yoga camp for children.

On Vijayadashmi, I took all fifty children to meet Swamiji. On that day, 3rd October 1995, he formally constituted Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. Swamiji was pleased to see the enthusiasm among the children. He said, "We have had many *mandals*, organizations for adults, but this is the first organization by children for children" and asked us to organize a yoga competition in Munger. He declared an asana competition and the winners were to be sent out from Munger to teach in other areas.

We realized we had a lot of hard work in front of us. There were a number of trained yoga teachers in Munger who had locked their certificates away. We approached them, explained the syllabus and provided children as demonstrators. Then we contacted small schools and began classes at twelve sites. We held a meeting to further inspire children and in only twenty days we managed to teach yoga to nearly one thousand children. We selected three hundred children from Munger for the competition.

We wanted to make sure that the asana concept did not get replaced with the gymnastic concept during the competition. The asana should remain as a yogic posture. On what basis should each child's performance be judged? We decided to give percentage marks on the following criteria: starting the

asana, going into the asana, maintaining it and leaving it. Thus we kept the yogic concept intact.

With the help of well-wishers from the ashram, thirteen camps were organized in different parts of the district. In those camps, 976 children participated and 300 were short listed for the yoga competition. The competition was divided into four categories: 8–12 year olds and 13–15 year old boys and girls. Swamiji was very generous in giving prizes. He gave four first prizes, eight second prizes, eleven third prizes and thirty-two consolation prizes. Swami Gyanprakash inaugurated the one-day event on 5th November and Swamiji awarded the prizes and certificates on 11th November. Swamiji also said that from now on he would take two children with him from Munger to every national yoga convention. It was a mega blessing for me.

Two children accompanied Swamiji to Kolkata, two to Sambalpur (Orissa), and another two went to Bilaspur (MP). In October, Swamiji took eight children to Delhi and Jaipur. These children were given an opportunity to have his divine guidance and to demonstrate at an All-India Conference.

In between, from 5–20 June 1996, a yoga instructor course for children was organized. A minimum of two children from all the important schools in Munger participated. In addition to asana, pranayama and yoga nidra, most of the children memorized Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Swamiji gave Child Yoga Instructor Certificates to fifty children. In May 1997, these children went to different parts of Bihar and taught yoga to children.

On Guru Poornima, Swamiji distributed special yoga uniforms to sixty-three children and entrusted them with the full responsibility for security and coordination of the day's activities. The children rose to Swamiji's expectations and performed their duties from 6–7 pm for two consecutive days, effectively managing the crowd of five thousand people who came to celebrate Guru Poornima. Swamiji was very happy and gave a copy of *Yoga Education for Children* to all the volunteers.

This massive response from the people was the result of a *Yoga Parichay Satra*, an introductory yoga camp organized in June by Yoga Mitra Mandal, Munger, at the Polo Ground. About five thousand people participated in the camp. There were twelve small stages and one central stage and, under the instruction of Sannyasi Chinmayananda, the children performed all the demonstrations. The rest of the children did the security work and moved about helping their elders to correct their postures. People were stunned at their performance.

After Guru Poornima, Swamiji set up three groups: a Gita group, a Ramayana group and a sankirtan group, and he began giving weekly classes on Sundays. Under his guidance, we proceeded slowly but surely to take this light from Munger city to Munger district, from the district to the state of Bihar, and from Bihar to the rest of India and the world.

As we said, in April 1995 we started yoga teaching with only seven children. By the end of October the children had formed a *Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal* (Children's Yoga Fellowship). We decided on four categories for a competition: 8–12 year old boys and girls and 13–15 year old girls and boys. The practice of surya namaskara was compulsory. The children also had to master ten common asanas and learn five advanced asanas. At the distribution of prizes Swamiji announced a state level yoga competition to be held in Munger in 1996. He said that we should be fully prepared as it should not happen that we teach the whole world but win no medals ourselves. Swamiji has made a program of yoga propagation for the next eleven years. From that day onward yoga training became necessary for us children. Adults will always have other responsibilities but the children can apply themselves fully to yoga training. Therefore, children should teach other children.

In June 1996 a children's yoga propagation course was organized at Ganga Darshan, Munger. The children were keen to teach but not to learn. We inspired them by awakening

their egos. We said, “Look, people from all over the world come here to learn yoga. It is a shame that we have to bring teachers from outside to teach you yoga.” Swamiji announced that the children who took the training would be sent all over Bihar to teach other children in 1997. This worked and the children were keen to learn.

More than fifty percent of the children memorized Chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. One small girl, who was having difficulty, succeeded ultimately by using the yogic method of memory recall. Many experiments are taking place in the field of yoga. However, forty years ago a psychiatrist named Mueller carried out this particular experiment. He divided children into two groups. Both groups were given identical material to memorize. The first group was told to play for half an hour before studying and the second group was told to rest for half an hour. The latter group fell asleep. After half an hour of study both groups were asked to recite the material. The first group displayed a recall of twenty-six percent and the second group a recall of fifty-six percent: a difference in recall of thirty percent. If children relax, rest and then study immediately it is very beneficial. If we give yoga nidra it will result in a difference of seventy percent! We never tested the children, but gave them scope for self-improvement. Nearly all gained the confidence to conduct a class.

When the children who accompanied Swamiji to Kolkata returned, they remarked that whenever they had previously visited a school and said they were from Munger, they were dismissed casually. But when they went out with Swamiji they were greeted with admiration and welcomed, and when asked if they knew anything about yoga they could reply, “Yes” with confidence.

Why Yoga Education by Children

Pallavi Prakash

I have been an instructor of yoga since the age of ten (1996). I was fortunate to be one of the first five who were taught by Vikas Bhaiya, and was also fortunate to be chosen through competition to demonstrate at an All-India Convention with Swami Niranjanananda in 1996.

As I was one of the first instructors, the concept of instructing yoga to children by children was so natural that finding arguments to support it seems a bit taxing. But as a child instructor I find that since the children are almost of my age group, I am more polite, alert and aware of them. My friends like to be taught by me because they consider having a school teacher teaching yoga is just like any other subject being taught. When a senior person teaches yoga, I find that children think that this is something for adults. But when children teach there is no necessity for explaining that yoga is necessary for children.

Another practical reason that Swamiji also points out is that our teachers are over-burdened with their volumes of lectures, so entrusting them with another direct responsibility is not good. We definitely need their support as coordinators. Whenever I take a class, the presence of my teacher is helpful in maintaining a disciplined atmosphere. And they also get time to relax. In the beginning when Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal sent me to conduct yoga classes in my school, the teachers doubted me, but the following year when another girl from

another school was sent, they objected. They started taking pride in seeing their own students capable of giving a yoga class.

I have had the honour of working in this project since its inception and have conviction that our model, inspired by Swami Niranjanananda, will be accepted as the norm.

Yoga for Children by Children: An Empirical Study with the Bihar Yoga System

Vikas Kumar (supervised by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati)

This study was carried out at Bihar Yoga Bharati and Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal.

Abstract

The purpose of the research was to study the effect of yoga practices on the development of the personalities and cognitive abilities of children. We were looking at memory, creativity, self-confidence, self-esteem and general discipline (as assessed by their parents). By observing two groups of children, an experimental group who practise a program devised by Swami Niranjanananda and a control group made up of children from the local schools, we found that those children who had been trained in the yoga program scored better in all categories.

Introduction

Many experiments are taking place in the field of yoga but most of these studies have been done on adults, looking at measurements of stress, skin resistance and other such physiological measures while they were performing yoga asanas, pranayama or meditation. Very few studies have actually been conducted looking at the effects of yoga on children's personality and cognitive development.

About forty years ago a study was done by a psychiatrist named Mueller. In his study he divided the children into two groups, a control and an experimental group. Both groups were given identical material to memorize. In his control group the children were asked to play for thirty minutes before studying the material for thirty minutes and in the experimental group the children were asked to rest for thirty minutes before studying the material for thirty minutes. After the half hour study, each group was asked to recite the material. The control group displayed a recall of 26% while the experimental group displayed a recall of 56%, a difference in recall ability of 30%. If children rest, relax, and study immediately after, it is beneficial. We are suggesting that if children are given a practice called yoga nidra, there would be a 70% recall.

A study was conducted in 1982 by a psychologist, Rishi Arundhati, with a young fourteen year old student preparing for his Oxford and Cambridge Ordinary Level examinations in History. He was given a tape with a pre-recorded, short ten minute yoga nidra practice and was asked to read the chapter on which he was to write a timed essay onto the cassette tape following the yoga nidra. It was found that his marks improved dramatically from thirteen out of twenty possible marks to an average of seventeen out of twenty marks for essays written throughout the year. Also the comments by the teacher were, "Excellent, high standard maintained." This student received highest marks for his O levels and went on to do Advanced levels and finally graduated from University with a Joint Honours First Level degree. Other studies carried out by Rishi Arundhati in 1983 with college students found the same results with the students feeling more confident going into exams and experiencing no memory block due to 'exam nerves'.

Materials

- Self-image questionnaire (untimed)
- Self-confidence questionnaire (untimed)

- Work and imagination test (1hour)
- Memory test (untimed)
- Questionnaire for parents
- Ball point pens for marking and writing test papers
- Stop watch.

Subjects

In total 702 children between the ages of eleven and fifteen years, from different schools, participated. 351 children were randomly selected and trained by Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and another 351 students from the local schools were placed in the control group.

Procedure

This research took place from June–November 1999. From 3–10 June, all participants were given a pre-test to determine a base score for memory, creativity, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The post-testing was carried out from 14–21 November after a period of yoga practice by the experimental group for 4 months, from 11 July to 11 November 1999. The testing was carried out by members of the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and was monitored by Vikas Kumar, and the post tests were additionally monitored by Rishi Arundhati Saraswati.

The yoga-trained group practised surya namaskara (salute to the sun), shashank-bhujangasana (striking cobra pose), sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose), bhramari pranayama (humming bee breath), nadi shodhana pranayama (alternate nostril breathing) and trataka (fixed gazing). Participants in the yoga trained group received regular monitored practice at their residence and group practice at Bihar Yoga Bharati on alternate Sundays.

The control group was made up of volunteers who were notified by their teachers and principals that children were needed for testing on the prescribed date and they were to show up at Bihar Yoga Bharati. When asked by Swami Arundhati, “Why did you come for the tests?” most said they were just interested to see what it was about, so no coercion

was used by the teachers to enlist their help in the study. As with the participants in the experimental group they had come out of curiosity. The children arrived early in the day for the tests and post-testing and were brought into the hall.

On post-testing, first, was an untimed self-esteem questionnaire, so the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and hand it in. The questionnaire was explained by the bal yogi administering the test before the participant began. When all the children being tested handed in their results, the second questionnaire on self-confidence was handed out and explained. This test was also untimed.

After all were finished with the self-confidence questionnaire, the third test booklet was distributed and explained. This was for testing creativity and fluidity in thinking and the participants were given one hour to complete the test. The third test for creativity was measured with four different tasks. Fifteen full minutes were allocated for each task.

1. Writing an essay on three problems, e.g. If a man could fly like a bird what would happen? If there was no need to eat what would happen? etc.
2. Thinking of new uses for familiar objects, e.g. a piece of stone, wooden cane.
3. Discovering new relationships, e.g. house/tree, chair/staircase.
4. Writing an essay about an object of choice, making it beautiful and attractive with plenty of fantasy and then drawing the object.

Creativity was measured in terms of:

1. Fluency – referring to the number of ideas.
2. Flexibility – referring to the variety and range of answers.

The memory tests were carried out individually by many different examiners who were also bal yogis and had been trained to conduct the tests in a consistent manner. This was done in groups of about twenty children being tested at one time. Those not being tested were kept in the hall and given a yoga nidra to keep them occupied. Two different types of memory tests were administered.

Type 1: Memory test

1. **Attention/concentration:** The subjects had to repeat rows of numbers of increasing length up to seven numbers, immediately after they were read out to them. First they had to repeat the correct order; in the second run they had to repeat numbers in reverse order.
2. **Delayed recall:** Unrelated words were read out at the rate of one word per second. They had to be repeated after a delay of one minute.
3. **Immediate recall:** Three sentences of increasing length were read out. Each sentence had to be repeated exactly.
4. **Retention of dissimilar pairs:** Ten pairs of unrelated words had to be recalled. Three trials were given.

Type 2: Memory test

1. **Mental balance:** The subjects had to repeat the alphabet at high speed from A to Z and then in reverse order from Z to A. Second test they had to repeat numbers from twenty to zero. Third test they had to count backwards from forty minus three, e.g. 40, 37, 34, etc.
2. **Visual retention:** Five cards with complicated geometric shapes were shown to the children for 15 seconds. They had to draw the image 30 seconds later.
3. **Remote memory:** Five questions relating to earlier memories, such as first day of school, age of siblings, own age.
4. **Recognition:** A card with different items, e.g. plate, spoons, was shown for forty seconds. After two minutes another card with many more items, e.g. restaurant table, was shown and the item from the first card had to be identified.

Results

Two types of memory tests were given. In Table 1 are the results for the memory tasks of Type 1: attention/concentration, delayed recall, immediate recall and retention of dissimilar pairs. In Table 2 are the results for the memory tasks of Type 2: mental balance, visual retention, remote memory and recognition.

Table 1

Distinct improvement of memory performance after yoga practice compared to control group

<i>Dimension of Memory</i>	<i>Significance</i>		<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
Attention/Concentration	1%	-	9.77	8.98	11.33	9.11	2.33	0.13
Delayed Recall	1%	-	8.41	7.84	8.86	7.72	0.45	-0.12
Immediate Recall	1%	-	6.47	5.89	7.6	6.29	1.12	0.4
Retention of Dissimilar Pairs*	1%	-	18.4	6.74	11.15	6.92	-7.25	0.18

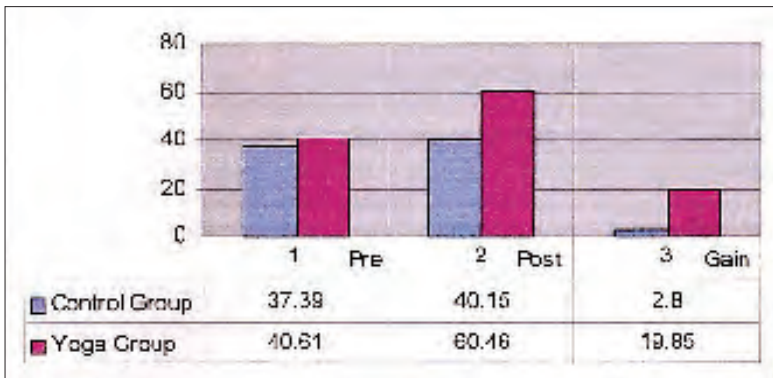
* Negative scores indicate high memory retention

Table 2

Improvement of memory performance in both groups showing a higher gain with the yoga group

<i>Dimension of Memory</i>	<i>Significance</i>		<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
Mental Balance	1%	1%	5.75	5.13	7.62	5.89	1.87	0.76
Visual Retention	1%	1%	6.61	8.23	11.39	8.77	4.78	0.54
Remote Memory	1%	5%	4.7	4.7	4.92	4.8	0.22	0.1
Recognition	1%	5%	9.05	8.56	9.75	8.84	0.7	0.28
Summary of Memory Score	1%	1%	70.48	70.68	84.64	75.35	14.16	4.67

Tables 1 and 2 shown graphically.

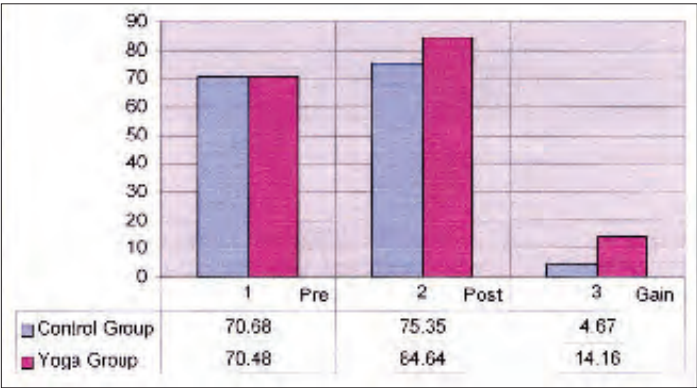
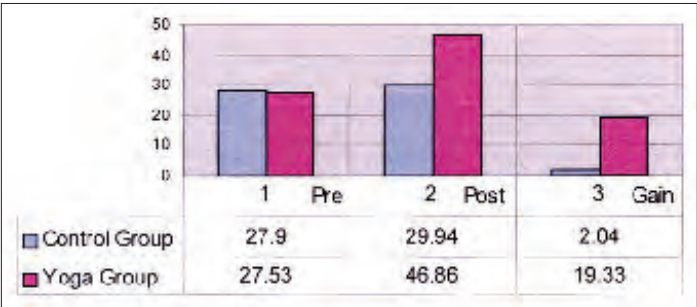


The results for the creativity test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Effect of yoga practices on measures of creativity

	<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
Fluency of Activity 1	13.24	10.53	17.59	1.39	4.36	0.84
Fluency of Activity 2	15.79	11.59	18.83	11.94	3.04	0.35
Fluency of Activity 3	14.02	10.87	16.1	10.93	2.08	0.06
Total Fluency Score	48.61	37.39	60.46	40.15	11.8	2.8
Flexibility of Activity 1	10.31	8.13	13.71	8.57	3.4	0.43
Flexibility of Activity 2	12.01	8.6	14.42	8.79	2.41	0.19
Flexibility of Activity 3	10.9	7.94	12.67	8.14	1.77	0.2
Total Flexibility Score	37.53	27.9	46.86	29.94	9.33	2.04

Table 3 shown graphically.



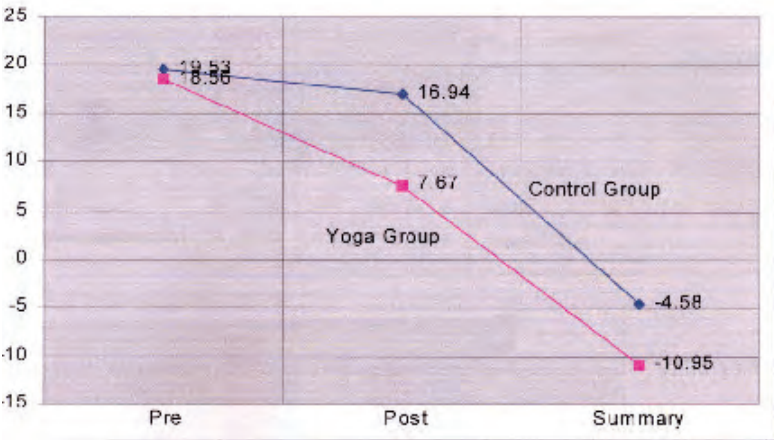
Results for the self-confidence questionnaire are shown in Table 4. Again the yoga trained group scored a larger range of change from the pre-test scores.

Table 4: Effect of yoga practices on self-confidence

<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
18.56	21.53	7.67	16.94	-10.95	-4.58

** Low values indicate high self-confidence*

Results of Table 4 shown graphically.



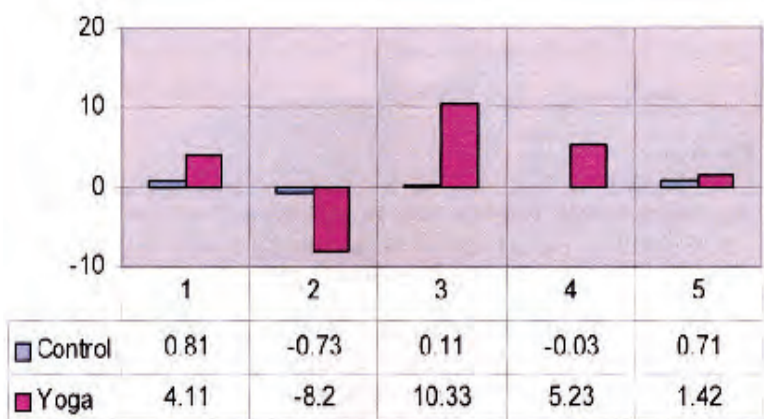
The results given in Table 5 show the difference in the self-esteem ratings by the two groups of children. The dimensions tested with this self-esteem questionnaire were how they estimated their intelligence, emotional balance, character, social skills and attractiveness. The results showed an overall gain by the yoga trained group.

Table 5: Effect of yoga practices on self-esteem ratings by school children

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
Intelligence	25.69	24.08	29.8	24.99	4.11	0.81
Emotion*	-10.7	-13	-2.5	-12.27	-8.2	-0.73
Character	45.14	42.87	55.47	42.98	10.33	0.11
Social	23.62	20.13	28.85	20.1	5.23	-0.03
Attraction	12.57	12.42	13.99	14.12	1.42	0.71

* Low score indicate high level of positivity

Below the results are shown graphically for Table 5.

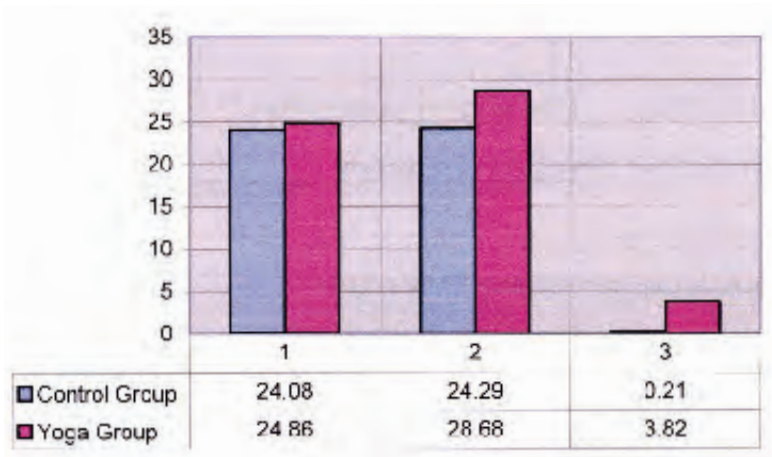


Results of the parents' answers to the questionnaire on general discipline are shown in Table 6

**Table 6: Effect of yoga practices on general discipline:
an assessment by parents**

<i>Pre-Test</i>		<i>Post-Test</i>		<i>Average Gain</i>	
Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control	Yoga	Control
2486	2408	2868	2429	382	021

Table 6 shown graphically.



Conclusion

The results of this study seem to indicate that those children who received the yoga training not only performed better on the four different tests given to them but those who were receiving yoga training had shown a remarkable change in general discipline as far as the parents could observe. One child had organized a yoga conference at the age of nine that drew 300 attendees. When he was asked how he did it, he replied that he just went from door to door and told the people about it and invited them to come. When he was asked if the practice of yoga has made a difference in his own life, he replied, “Yes.” When asked how it has made a difference, he said that he used to love to go through the town and turn over people’s garbage cans or rubbish bins, but now he could not do that anymore because when the people saw him coming they all said, “Here comes the yoga boy.” So now he has to behave differently.

More research should be carried out and an in-depth statistical analysis of the data should be done in order to determine the probability of these results happening as a result of the yoga practice and not just by chance.

The whole movement of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal has in the meantime grown. As of 2009 thousands of children have been trained in different capacities within the Bal Yoga movement. The following graph and tables show the amount of general training given by the original students who started the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal and the specified training taken by those who are members of this movement.

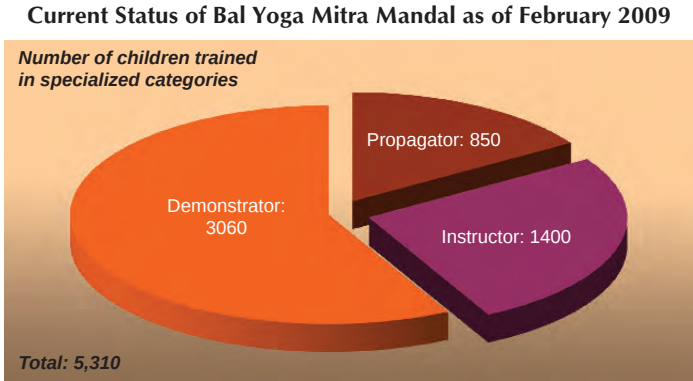


Table 7: Yoga Learning Group

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total children trained in that year</i>	<i>Total children trained by the end of the year</i>
1995	1000	1000
1996	1400	2400
1997	13,700	16,100
1998	16,500	32,600
1999	6,500	39,100
2000	7,000	46,100
2001	10,500	56,600
2002	26,210	82,810
2003	12,641	95,451
2004	5,849	1,01,300
2005	5,415	1,06,715
2006	390	1,07,105
2007	7,324	1,14,429
2008	8,341	1,22,770

Table 8: Yoga Training Group

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>
Pradarshak (Demonstrators)	3,060
Anudeshak (Instructors)	1,400
Pracharak (Propagators)	850
Total	5,310

Table 9: Total Number of Schools

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Schools</i>
1995	13 (Oct Satra)
1996	25 (Oct Satra)
1997	189 (41 Bihar tour – 10 district of Bihar, 78 Bariarpur, 8 Delhi, 62 Munger)
1998	61 (MP tour, Satna, Jabalpur, Raipur, Gondia, Bilaspur, Rajnandgaon, Kondagaon, Munger)
1999	20 (Ghatshila, Delhi, Gondia, Durgapur, Jamalpur)
2000	26 (Munger, Jamalpur, Bariarpur, Kharagpur, Dharahra)
2001	80 (Munger, Bariarpur, Jamalpur, Chhat Angan)
2002	100 (Munger, Bariarpur, Jamalpur, Chhat Angan)
2003	194 (Yoga Gyan Pariksha)
2004	12 (Lakhisarai, Jabalpur, etc.)
2005	234 (Munger, Jamalpur, Naugadhi, Bariarpur, Indore – MP, Ranchi – Jharkhand)
2006	7 (Indore – MP)
2007	233 (Pologround program, Munger, Jamalpur, Bariarpur, Satna, Raipur, Chennai, Dharahara, etc.)
2008	253 (Munger, Bhagalpur, Dharahara and Pologround program, Munger)
Total	1,447

As of February 2009, the bal movement now consists of three different age groups:

1. Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal (children age 7–14)
2. Bal Yuva Yoga Mitra Mandal (15–18 years of age)
3. Yuva Yoga Mitral Mandal (16–25 years of age).

As can be seen from the tables, 1,22,770 children now belong to the yoga learning group. A total of 5,310 children are involved in the yoga training group as yoga propagators, instructors and demonstrators, thereby becoming empowered to change their lives and that of others. This movement, children teaching children, is spreading to the west, in countries like Canada, USA, Brazil and Uruguay.

15

The Kanyas and Batuks of Rikhia

Swami Kriyabhava Saraswati

The kanyas and batuks of Rikhia now number over two thousand. With a near even split between the *kanyas* (young girls) and the *batuks* (young boys), they represent every village and every family within the Rikhia panchayat. After a large intake of children in January 2006, nearly all the eligible children aged between six and twelve years from Rikhia panchayat have been adopted into the ever expanding family of Swami Satyananda.

These children have all been born since Sri Swamiji came to Rikhia and they are the children of his neighbours whom he has pledged to uplift. Upliftment does not mean ordinary charity. As Sri Swamiji has said, “Charity is the mother of poverty,” and true to his word he is not fostering a culture reliant on dependency. Rather, through the kanyas and batuks he is laying the foundation for a prosperous future, as these children are receiving an education and aid in its broadest sense. They are being fostered and guided to become self-confident and independent. One day these children will become parents and conscious members of their community. As parents they will demand that their children have access to education and receive the opportunities they were exposed to. As community members they will be better equipped to make informed decisions and to play an active role in creating a prosperous future.

Swami Satsangi watches vigilantly over the children of Sri Swamiji and personally directs all aspects of their activities and management. She repeatedly assures parents that the ashram asks nothing from them in return, except that their children attend classes daily. After being with the kanyas and batuks for over four years, I am seeing the truth and the reason behind this mandate in those children who are most regular in their integration with the ashram and its activities. With regular exposure, their innate qualities of purity, intelligence and creativity become the predominant expression of their nature.

The kanyas and batuks are increasingly playing an integral role as hosts of all activities and programs conducted at Rikhiapeeth. The thousands of guests and devotees who attend the various programs throughout the year often comment on the poise and confidence of the kanyas and batuks, as they conduct all aspects of proceedings from announcements and chanting to escorting and seating guests, book distribution, tilak and pooja. The children are diligent in their respective duties. A common query from them before any big program is, “Teacher, what is my duty?” During Sita Kalyanam they have excelled as hosts of this grand event – their contagious enthusiasm is felt by all as they are ever ready to guide and direct the thousands of visitors. They are the hands and eyes of Sri Swamiji and his presence is felt through their willingness to serve. Prasad taken in the Rikhia kitchen during large programs is under the direction of the ‘bhoj’ team who confidently direct serving. At every step you meet the smiling faces of children who through their involvement are gaining greater awareness of themselves and those around them.

Sometimes, the line between who is the giver and who is the receiver becomes blurred. Ashram residents often wonder who is learning more, the children from us or we from the children. As the kanyas and batuks become an increasingly integral part of Rikhia ashram, we are being guided by their example to reconnect with the innocence within and

to experience that joy of being that children remind us of. Through this mutual relationship of giving and receiving, the kanyas and batuks have an opportunity to experience a balanced and holistic childhood wherein they can express the beauty and innocence of being children.

These children lead very busy lives. A typical day begins early, especially during the hotter months when many of the household chores are done in the cooler morning hours. After fulfilling some of their household responsibilities, they may come for their surya namaskara class at the ashram which can be up to three or four kilometres from their homes. At 6.30 am they then attend their local schools until 11.00 am. After school, they return home and take up their share of responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, tending livestock, fetching water and many of the numerous activities of maintaining a household. From 2.30 pm they begin flooding back to the ashram for their half-hour English class. More advanced students attend their own class and then stay to 'assist' as teachers for beginners' classes. Between 2.30–5.30 pm English classes are conducted for all 952 children. After English classes some children then move on to the computer class. During this time some children also manage a session with local tutors to assist their studies or a game of cricket in the fields!

At 5.15 pm it is back to the ashram for the evening kirtan and chanting program. After seating the guests and fulfilling their duties, it is time for them to enjoy themselves. As the kirtans build up slowly, they struggle to contain their joy and often dance with abandon, losing themselves in the rhythm and mantras. After returning home, they have homework and studies to do. These children are often on the go for sixteen hours or more – finding a balance between home, school, ashram and play is a challenge they rise to and conquer.

This reality is well known to Sri Swamiji who spoke in a satsang several years ago about the hardships borne by these children from a very tender age, which rob them of a chance to enjoy the innocent joys of childhood. Being in the ashram

has given them an opportunity to regain these joys, which will help them in their later life.

Sri Swamiji has a very encompassing vision regarding the kanyas and batuks. He has, in fact, gone a step further and made arrangements to show them various films. This idea has taken shape in the form of Sunday afternoon film showings in the sadhana hall, Yajñashala. The kanyas and batuks are all invited to attend and have been shown a wide variety of films including 'Harry Potter', nature documentaries and the new release Hanuman animation. They are vocal and expressive in their appreciation of the films. A surprise favorite was the 'Laurel and Hardy' series that had them roaring with laughter. The films are hot topics of conversation for the following week as they retell certain scenes. Despite their rural surroundings, the kanyas and batuks can truly be said to have the 'best of both worlds'. As Sri Swamiji has rightly pointed out, "You see, at least under this pretext the children will not visit the *hatia*, the local market place, during this interval. And what are they being exposed to in the *hatia*? To loafers, gambling, smoking, and lecherousness. Staying here, they discover exciting and newer dimensions of life and learn ways to make their life holistic, satisfying and successful."

The Yajñashala is a central point for many of the children's activities – it is also their cinema and dance hall where they can express without inhibitions in their unique way to the fast paced kirtans. Sri Swamiji has aptly summed this up while saying, "These children have become God intoxicated and they, in turn, intoxicate all those listening to their kirtans, who also start dancing to their tune!" The announcement: "The words of our next kirtan are . . ." is often followed with joyous claps of approval and well-justified anticipation.

The sheer number of kanyas and batuks, over two thousand, can often seem overwhelming – a sea of smiles and curious inquisitive eyes. But as their teacher, I challenge myself daily to meet and see them all as individuals – each as the child of Sri Swamiji, with their own needs and potentials. The range of activities opened to them here at the ashram

in Rikhia, in a non-competitive way, enables each child to establish their identity as an individual and to excel, whether in English language, kirtan, dance, computer, yoga, performing duties during programs or assisting in management as class or village monitors.

The kanyas and batuks are given the opportunity to attend daily half-hour interactive English classes where basic English is taught along with games, songs and much laughter. The English classes conducted for the kanyas and batuks are a progressive series beginning from class 1 and up to class 6. The kanyas of class 6 are currently exploring various styles of writing, such as journalistic, descriptive and emotive. They are able to converse in English and are keen to be corrected of any mistakes in their use of the language. This solid foundation in English will open many opportunities previously unimaginable to them. Their dreams and hopes for their future are varied, but I can assure you they have goals and direction that, through the grace of Sri Swamiji, they will be able to pursue. Their hopes for the future cross spectrums of becoming social workers, doctors, farmers, business women/men, inspectors and parents. The dreams of these children represent a huge change here in Rikhia, where previously thoughts beyond daily survival and sustenance were impossible. The hopes of the kanyas and batuks demonstrate the prosperity and expanding awareness of the community – a brighter future of opportunity is being created by the dreams of these children.

Computer classes are another expanding area of education for the kanyas and batuks. Selected students are taught how to navigate programs such as Word and Excel. They particularly love exploring Power Point and creating invitations and pictures. The senior class has begun creating a syllabus so that they can be the teachers of future beginners' classes. They are also involved in helping to write and print program announcements, which is a practical application of their skills.

Since January 2006, a new aspect of yogic education is being imparted to the batuks of Rikhia in the form of daily

surya namaskara classes. In the early hours of the morning, the selected fifty boys leave their homes to attend their class, which is a combination of asanas and surya mantras. When Sri Swamiji first began this class the reaction from the boys was mixed. Many were thrilled, others were unsure what yoga was, but all were curious and willing. Over the last several months their commitment has deepened, as has their experiences in these classes.

Under the direct guidance of Swami Satsangi, a core group has been expertly trained in mantra chanting, with impeccable timing and pronunciation. They can now confidently lead *Ramayana* chanting, *Bhagavad Gita*, vedic mantras, bhajans and an extensive range of much loved kirtans that take audiences through experiences of ecstasy and devotion. Their pronunciation of Sanskrit stotras is better than that of life-long trained pandits, and the purity and innocence of their voices guide people back to that well of bhakti within us all. All guests and visitors who come to Rikhia leave with many memories, but definitely some of their fondest are of the dynamic kirtans sung by the kanyas and batuks, accompanied by spontaneous dancers whose unique style and freedom of expression is not easily forgotten.

As individuals, the kanyas and batuks are opening up to their own potential and the opportunities around them. As a group, they can be overwhelming in their ceaseless energy. However, they are beginning to take a unique form as older children help guide and discipline younger ones and create structure and guidelines that they themselves implement during classes and programs. The concept of older children guiding the younger and newer students is continually being fostered. By allowing elder students to be involved in establishing and implementing guidelines for behaviour and discipline, they are developing an internal structure of management which is practical and without bias. Evidence of its effectiveness is starting to be seen as these children sit through four-hour programs (which challenges the self-discipline of most adults and sannyasins) with relatively few 'teachers' supervising them.

Sri Swamiji often repeats the mantra, “Give, Give, Give.” He has perfected this mandate from Swami Sivananda in the way he so openly, generously and continuously gives to the kanyas and batuks. This is made possible by the generous donations received from devotees around the world. The children keep receiving all their educational requirements as prasad from the ashram – including school bags, books, stationery and school uniforms complete with ties, belts, shoes, cardigans for winter months, umbrellas and also chocolates on a regular basis. The kanyas and batuks receive many sets of designer clothing each year which, despite the rural environment, they manage to keep in impeccable condition. On a visit to Rikhia you may see them proudly wearing their Spanish, Chennai or Rajasthani outfits.

These children live in the villages that surround Rikhia ashram – before you reach the ashram you will be welcomed by many greetings of “Namo Narayan” from across fields and from mud huts. This is the official greeting used in the ashram and is often among the first words spoken by the children of Rikhia after “Ma”. The kanyas and batuks welcome all to Rikhia and guide them towards the ashram, ‘their ashram’, with their chorus of “Namo Narayan”.

So if you ever come to Rikhia and a bright-eyed child greets you with “Namo Narayan” and then asks “What is your name?” and “Where do you live?”, be assured that you have been fortunate to meet one of the kanyas/batuks of Rikhia, the blessed children of Sri Swamiji. This simple conversation is a glimpse of the seeds being sown here in Rikhia. These humble beginnings are signs of a new prosperous future for these children and generations to come. A future that they will be free to create for themselves based on awareness and opportunity. It all starts with ‘A, B, C’. Sri Swamiji holds the vision and the seeds have been planted. We just have to be patient and watch as each seed blossoms and grows to its full potential.

My Experience as a Rikhia Kanya

Sinu Kumari

In January 1998, at the age of six years, I started going to the ashram for the first time. From then onwards, until January 13, 2007, I remained in close contact with the ashram as a 'Rikhia kanya'.

During the initial years I used to go to the ashram only for English classes. I was taught to read, write and talk in English. I was also taught some mantras and kirtan. In my English class I learnt to chant the Saraswati Vandana, which along with some other kanyas, I once sang for Sri Swamiji. I was very happy that day.

I liked going to the English classes very much. The environment of the class was very good and friendly. We were taught English in a play-way method. As well as English, we learnt dancing, singing and drawing. I enjoyed all these subjects very much so I always used to go to the ashram a few minutes before my class started because I never liked to miss the class. All the equipment for learning English was available in the classroom itself. Books, copies, pencils and even uniforms were supplied to us by the ashram. Also dictionaries, instrument boxes, storybooks, toys, umbrellas, etc., were given to us in the form of gifts occasionally. These things were very useful to us in our schools.

There were some good books related to science and general knowledge in the class library, which helped me to broaden my knowledge in many fields. Although I have done my primary and secondary education in Hindi medium schools, my English is comparatively good due to the contribution of the ashram. This has helped me to adopt the English medium in higher education.

I sang kirtan with other 'chanting' kanyas for the first time on the occasion of Basant Panchami, where we sang Saraswati Maha Saraswati. Gradually, we started singing

during other ashram events and the daily evening programs. Later, we were also taught stotras. On the occasion of Chaitra and Ashwin Navaratras, recitation of slokas from *Ramacharitamanas* was started in the the ashram. After some time recitations of the entire *Bhagavad Gita* and Sundarkand of *Ramacharitamanas* were also started every Ekadashi and Poornima respectively. In the initial phase we used to listen to the recitations. Gradually we were taught to chant the 'path'. Ultimately the team of kanyas started doing the recitations. Thus, we substituted for the sannyasins in the work of reciting the mantras and stotras and in the singing of kirtans.

I am happy that Sri Swamiji gave us the chance to conduct these programs. We felt very satisfied to see the audiences spellbound during our recitations. Sometimes, it also happened that when we sang kirtans, so many people, including Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, could not stop themselves from dancing.

From 2003 to 2007 we conducted all the recitations in the ashram except the 'path' of Durga Saptashati and some others which were done by the pandits. This became possible for us only due to the able and efficient guidance provided by our respected Swami Satsangi. We learnt all the kirtans, stotras, mantra path and *Gita* path from Swami Satsangi. The recitations of *Ramacharitamanas* was taught us by Sannyasi Mantranidhi. Some other sannyasins also helped us in these works. On behalf of all the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia, I would like to thank them all and offer my humble pranams.

In the beginning, only kanyas were admitted for classes at the ashram and the total number was only twelve or thirteen students. Now the number is over five hundred kanyas. After several years boys were also admitted and now they also number over five hundred. Now, some of the kanyas and batuks also go to the ashram for computer classes. I received computer education there for the first time.

In the last few years, the kanyas and batuks have received at least ten sets of beautiful dresses each year from the ashram,

which are donated by different people from India and abroad. Like all the other kanyas, I was very happy when I received them. Some of the outfits were traditional and others were modern. I felt very happy whenever I wore them.

We felt quite relaxed and comfortable inside the ashram premises due to the love and affection we received from Sri Swamiji, Swami Niranjanji, Swami Satsangiji and other sannyasins. I would like to share one example with you. Once, a few days before Sita Kalyanam, I was playing with some of the other kanyas in the Tapowan area, the place where yajna is conducted. Swami Niranjan came to supervise the preparations for the yajna. He took the skipping rope from one of us and started skipping! We all became very happy to see him playing with us and started laughing.

I have met many new people in the ashram from all corners of the world, from different castes, religions and nationalities. I talk to them and learn many things about their cultures and societies. I make friends with children from different parts of India and the rest of the world who come to visit the ashram. I really enjoy playing and talking with them.

All the festivals related to the different religions of the world are celebrated in the Rikhia ashram. I celebrated Christmas there for the first time. Once, some women from Iran came to the ashram for a yoga course. During the course, one day was called ‘Tajia Muharram’. We sang the Sufi mantra ‘Anal Haq’, and they also sang some Sufi songs.

As a kanya of Rikhia, each year in the ashram I have had the rare opportunity and experience to chant the complete *Ramacharitamanas* twice, *Sundarkand* twelve times and *Bhagavad Gita* twenty-four times. All the kanyas and batuks are fed in the ashram during every festival and event. I ate so many types of dishes for the first time in the ashram.

The above described experiences as a kanya are just a small part of my total experience. My many sweet memories of the ashram are indescribable for me. In conclusion, I can honestly say that I am very proud to be a ‘Rikhia kanya’.

16

Yuva Yoga: Youth Empowerment

Rishi Arundhati Saraswati

Rites of passage

Previously, in all earlier societies, when a child in the society reached the stage of puberty he was initiated by his elders into the society as a child becoming an adult. Some of these customs are still held today, e.g. the Barmitzvah, the ceremony that all young Jewish boys go through for acceptance as an adult into the society.

This formal recognition that gave the developing adult this rite of passage, which may be expressed as: “I will treat you as an adult from now on, therefore, it is your duty to accept your role as an adult within the society and to act accordingly”, does not exist in most industrialized societies today. There are some activities that are seen as rites of passage, such as school graduation or confirmation as performed by the Catholic Church, but these are not the same as rites of passage. These recognitions are associated more with academic achievements and moral maturity than with advancement into the social structure as an adult.

Physical growth and development in adolescence

Accurate knowledge of the normal growth and development of children is essential for those who want to teach yoga to children. Yoga is not a form of gymnastics. When applied appropriately, according to the age of a student, yoga can be of great benefit.

From the ages of twelve or thirteen, the body begins to go through more obvious changes than it has by the age of eight. Body growth in boys and girls is a continuing process throughout childhood and adolescence. It is exceedingly rapid in the first two years of life and less so during the middle years of childhood. However, maturation of organs and glands continues during this time of middle childhood. Later, there is a spurt of growth in relation to puberty, followed by cessation of growth when the adult height and organ development and changes are reached.

At puberty there are several notable physiological changes, such as spurts of growth, functional and structural changes, maturation of the sex organs and development of secondary sexual characteristics. The male body experiences increase in muscle mass, broadening of the shoulders and the voice breaks, whereas in the female body there is rapid pelvic growth, fat increases over the shoulders, pelvis, buttocks and thighs. Increased subcutaneous fat on the trunk and increased thickness to the limbs for females between one to eight years continues. For this reason, slow moving yoga asanas for burning fat cells are ideal for obese children of the West.

It is thought that puberty begins when the hypothalamus becomes less sensitive to the fold-back mechanism of the small quantities of sex hormones produced during childhood by the gonads. Luteinising hormone (LH) releasing (LHRH) therefore increases the blood levels of LH and increases follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). FSH in the male stimulates production of spermatozoa by the testes. In the female, it stimulates follicular development in the ovary and oestrogen synthesis by the follicles. LH in the male stimulates Leydig cell function and testosterone synthesis. When it reaches the target organ it is converted into dihydrotestosterone (DHT) by the enzyme 5 reductase. DHT is metabolically more active than testosterone and its formation is essential for full masculinization to take place. LH in the female also stimulates oestrogen synthesis. It induces ovulation and hence the formation of corpora lutea which produces progesterone.

In both male and female there is a sharp increase in plasma levels of androgen of adrenal origin before those of LH and FSH. The adrenal androgens stimulate growth of pubic and auxiliary hair and possibly the anabolic process associated with skeletal maturation and the growth spurts.

The systematic practice of yogasanas helps to keep the glandular system balanced and functioning well. When practicing the sequences of asanas there is stimulation and balancing within the thyroid gland. This gland is the second most important gland in the body and controls all the lower glands.

Psychological growth and development in adolescence

During the years of adolescence, psychological changes accompany the physiological changes in both male and females. Adolescence refers to the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Its age limits are not clearly specified, but it extends roughly from the age of twelve to the late teens, when physical growth is nearly complete. During this period, the young person develops to sexual maturity, establishes his identity as an individual apart from his family and faces the task of deciding how to earn a living. A concept of who he is and where he is going helps to formulate standards of conduct for himself and for evaluating the behaviour of others. He must know what he values is important and worth doing. And he needs a sense of his own worth and competence. Young people are not given many adult privileges until late in their teens. In most western countries they cannot work full time, sign legal documents, drink alcoholic beverages, marry or vote.

Freedom from parental authority and from emotional dependence starts in childhood, but the process of emancipation is greatly accelerated during the early years of adolescence. To function effectively as an adult, the adolescent needs to begin to detach himself from his family and develop independence in behaviour, emotions, values and beliefs. Problems of rebellion and resistance to

parental control during adolescence are almost invariably a continuation of problems that began earlier in childhood.

According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, at the time of adolescence there is the need for the establishment of identity. At this age the parents become less of a role model for developing attitudes, tastes, etc., however, peer groups and outgroups are more important models of leadership. At this stage the adolescent is striving to be himself and often sees parental guidance as an effort to make him into the parent's image rather than allowing him to be himself. A group such as the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is the ideal peer group.

Sexual development, like any other form of development, follows a difference in the rate of onset, with those who are late maturing being the most vulnerable to feelings of less self-confidence and independence. Late maturing males face a particularly difficult adjustment because of the importance of strength and physical prowess in their peer activities. Studies indicate that males who mature late tend to be less popular than their classmates, have poorer self-concepts and engage in more immature attention-seeking behaviour. The effects of late maturation on the personality of females is less striking than that in the male. A few personality differences between early and late maturers persist into adulthood, long after the physical differences have disappeared.

During adolescence, one begins to re-examine many of the beliefs one had previously considered to be immutable truths. New experiences and new cognitive abilities that emerge during adolescence prompt one to challenge some of the values and beliefs incorporated from the parents. This re-examination in early adolescence may be due to moving from a small neighbourhood elementary school to a larger, more heterogeneous junior or senior high school and, therefore, being exposed to a wider peer group and the increase in development of the cognitive abilities, to the point where he can think in more abstract and relative terms.

Individuals vary in their need for conformity, whether it be to parental or peer standards. The more self-confident and assured the young person is, the less he will feel the need for blind adherence to anyone else's norms. He can evaluate for himself what is important among the various views proposed and arrive at his own conclusions. This is the essence of finding one's identity.

Yoga for empowerment in adolescent transition to adulthood

Developing one's own identity, dealing with sexual maturation and development, emancipation from home and re-examination of beliefs are the major psychological developments for the adolescent. A method for providing the major necessities for a healthy confident lifestyle should be introduced to the adolescent, if not before adolescence. Yoga for the teenager is ideal for introducing what we call the '3 Fs of Empowerment': *Fitness, Felicity and Focus* – the three necessary qualities of an education to ensure capable transition to adulthood with self-confidence, positive self-image and self-control and a well rounded personality capable of excelling.

Fitness

Yoga asanas are an ideal way to bring about fitness. The postures not only help to strengthen bones and muscles, but when one reaches the adolescence stage, the execution of the postures is done with more time and awareness than when one is younger and the body is still developing. Physical movements from one posture to another provide strength, flexibility and health in general to the bones and muscles, however, maintaining the positions for a period of time brings about internal hormonal and cellular changes. Slowing down of the maturation of sex glands and hormonal activity may produce psychological ill-ease during this important time of life, but research has shown that females in particular who are active in gymnastics have a later onset

of the menstrual period and have a tendency to less breast cancer as adults.

For the adolescent, as with most adults, time plays a big role in how well we take care of ourselves both physically and psychologically. From the ages of fourteen to twenty-four, education is a very important activity in life and more and more demands are being made on the students to achieve even higher and higher standards. So, the yoga activity for a person of this age needs to be one that is easily remembered and does not take a lot of thought or time to bring it about. This is the time of life when asana sequences are very useful tools. Most of the sequences of asanas, e.g. surya namaskara, ardha chandra namaskara, poorna chandra namaskara, chandra namaskara sequence, chandra sequence or warrior sequence (see Chapter 24: *Asana and Pranayama*), are not just asana practices, but include pranayama (breathing practices) and also something for the mind to be doing while in the positions.

The value of the sequences is that they are well-rounded sets of postures that have been put together to bring about the maximum state of total health with a minimum of effort. The breath and concentration that accompanies the postures makes these sequences a complete sadhana. Swami Sivananda called the surya namaskara sequence a real yoga tonic. A nice slow round (twice through) of chandra namaskara sequence usually takes twelve minutes. Follow that with three minutes 'relaxed alertness' (awareness of body, natural breath and environment i.e. sounds, smells and touch.) This is a great fifteen minute yoga workout that will help one to continue to grow. Hey! You owe yourself fifteen minutes to feel good and stay healthy.

Felicity

Whichever system is used, the individual should include methods for developing and directing their emotional states. According to the dictionary, 'felicity' is defined as, "a condition of supreme happiness, blissfulness, prosperity;

appropriateness; a neat or well-chosen expression.” According to yoga philosophy, the basis of our nature is bliss. So how can yoga help the adolescent experience this level in himself? Due to the extreme changes in hormones and ideas during this time, it may be difficult to get the teen to even consider this a possibility. What? With all the papers I have to write and the books I have to read, when do I have time to follow my own bliss, as the late Professor Joseph Campbell called it.

Everyone has a right to feel good about himself and his environment and often it is our environment that keeps us from this expression of our blissful nature by providing problems which take our attention totally, so that we forget that we are bliss. The deeper we involve ourselves in the problems the more stress we create for ourselves. However, opting out of society is not the solution for experiencing more bliss. How can you experience bliss if you see your neighbour suffering? Again, yoga gives us a technique whereby we can rapidly reduce the physiological symptoms of stress, such as fast heart beat, fast breath and excessive adrenaline introduction into the blood stream, which promotes fear, anger, anxiety and so on; and at the same time this technique helps induce clarity of thinking. It is as simple as the complete breath, a slowing down of the whole breathing process and utilizing the total lung capacity. We know that this is the most efficient form of respiration, i.e. the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide. So, we are not only calming down those internal processes with the control of breath rate, but are also getting greater oxygen for carbon dioxide exchange and the resulting benefits for the lungs, skin, brain and so on.

A second form of pranayama, which is very important and should not be left out, is nadi shodhana. This can be practiced as simply happy breathing (alternating without retention), or continued as full nadi shodhana in which you develop your own ratio of maybe, one inhalation to four retention to two exhalation to half retention. Research done in 1988 using an

electro encephalograph (EEG) showed that when the right nostril is blocked and the breath is drawn in through the left nostril, activity in the brain wave patterns in the right side of the brain rose while the same side brain, i.e. left brain hemisphere was quiescent. The opposite was also true; air in the right nostril raises left hemispheric activity.

From research in psychology, we know that the different brain hemispheres store different types of information. The left hemisphere is where language abilities, mathematics, etc., are stored, whereas the right hemisphere stores information to do with spatial perception, appreciation of arts, music, etc. Also, studies have indicated that the majority of the time, either the right or left nostril is dominant in terms of amount of air entering the lungs through the nostrils. One nostril will be flowing freely and the other slightly engorged, slightly blocked. They also noted that approximately every ninety minutes, the nostril dominance changes. There is usually a short matter of seconds when both flow freely and then the dominance changes to the other nostril.

So, at exam time it is important to be able to be aware of the nostril dominance and understand ways to bring about the free flow in the nostrils and, therefore, stimulation to the side of the brain necessary for exam performance. Learn from a guru how to use a danda for nostril dominance control. In yoga this is called *swara*, breath regulation.

The key to felicity is deep breathing. The more you practise it the more it becomes a natural state and you start to breathe correctly, automatically. There are many breathing techniques available in yoga: bhramari (humming bee breath), to quieten the mind and induce relaxation, bhastrika (bellows breath), to warm the body, seetkari and sheetali, to cool the body down and many others. Remember also that deep relaxed breathing helps clean the blood which is very beneficial for the skin, lungs and general wellbeing. All these breathing practices are well described in Chapter 24: Asana and Pranayama: Postures and Breath Control.

Focus

Probably the most important thing for the adolescent to know is how to develop the ability to focus the mind. If I want to play sports, my coach gives me exercises that will build the muscles, stamina and agility necessary to learn and play the game. The teachers who give instructions about subjects that deal with sciences and philosophies, simply tell me to learn this or that, memorize this poem by Friday, concentrate on what you are doing. Yet, they fail to teach us the exercises that we need in order to build our mental muscles for learning, memorizing and concentrating. The primary aim of yoga is to develop consciousness, therefore, there are many techniques described in yoga for helping to develop *dharana* and *dhyana* (concentration and absorption).

What one should also understand about learning and concentration is that, like many other body rhythms, concentration runs fairly well on average for about ninety minutes, then it drops off radically and reaches a point when nothing is going in. It is important that a ten minute break be taken and then, when the studying begins again, the concentration is back up near its previous level. Remember, if you do not take the break, you are wasting your time. So, no guilt! Take ten minutes, have a cup of tea, do three rounds of surya namaskara or walk outside and have some fresh air, then begin again and make things easier and productive for yourself. These are things that teachers should be aware of as well and keep in mind.

Yoga practices that help to develop focus, such as relaxed alertness – yoga nidra, fixed gazing – *trataka*, learning to listen – *nada yoga*, and visualization tests, among others, are well described in Chapter 23: Yoga Nidra and Other Meditations for Children and Chapter 22: Pratyahara and Dharana – Relaxation and Concentration.

Techniques

17

Yoga Games

Sannyasi Nawaratri and Vikas Kumar

Introduction

Games played at the end of a yoga class help reinforce what has been taught. Not only are the games fun, but they also help as a tool to get through the class, maintaining the focus of the children. Yoga games are found to be especially successful and, therefore, useful with children who have learning difficulties or problems with authority. These are based on the teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati and Swami Sivananda. Also notes and research of psychologists, scientists (including those doing research on plants), students and observation of children during yoga classes have contributed to this chapter.

Children find it difficult to remember the poses, but yoga games help with this tremendously. Kids today want to know why they are doing specific poses, what are the benefits? How does doing yoga affect the physical, mental and emotional bodies? Some poses have cautions – what are these and how does the pose affect the body if we come under that particular caution? They know yoga will help them stay healthy. In particular, the kids know that yoga helps them get better grades in school. Yoga, they know, will help them stay calmer in class and to be less disruptive. If the child's problem is being too introverted and not actively participating (though they may be mentally), they know yoga helps them to overcome this. The do's and don'ts of

yoga – yamas and niyamas – are also easier to disseminate. Children want to know these and more. It is known that children learn and remember when they are relaxed and enjoying themselves.

Sometimes the opposite occurs – children do not want to know. Their apathy is due to lack of stimulation, being put down by figures of authority, incorrect or inaccurate information, misconceptions, or due to some other reasons. They are therefore listless and do not want to make the effort. Supplying the child with more information makes them want to do yoga. The child feels respected and acknowledged. Interest is stirred up. Games to do with yoga help here.

Defiant children do not want to accept anything taught by an adult. They wish to see for themselves and then decide whether they accept the subject being taught and the teacher or reject one or both. Some, who have been mistreated and abused, also have defiance; they question everything and demand to know. Explaining the benefits, precautions and how yoga works, helps get their acceptance and brings their guard down. Or just playing yoga games with the children who do not wish to participate when yoga is taught in a traditional class atmosphere and structure helps to break the ice. According to Swami Satyananda Saraswati's method, the children who do not want to join in are told that at anytime they wish to do so they may. They are then left alone to make their own decision. Even if it means that you have only one or two, or even none of the children following your instructions, still continue teaching the class as though they are. You may think that they are not interested or not paying attention, when actually they are. Invariably either the same day or within a class or two, they participate of their own volition.

To explain the above: at a children's shelter where there were girls and boys, three groups were being taught yoga. Although I knew that the groups consisted of only all girls, I thought that perhaps one boy was included or that he

accidentally got into a group in the shuffle. This child cursed and swore to the extent that would make a sailor blush, threw shoes and himself into the group practising yoga. I ignored the obscenities and behaviour and only invited the child to join in the class whenever he wanted to. The other children followed my cue. The next week the child was not there, or so I thought. A girl was sitting immediately in front of me whom I had not noticed last time. Before I could say or ask anything, the other girls cleared up the mystery. It was the same child who had been swearing and abusive in the last class. This time the child had cleaned up and wore girl's clothing instead of boy's. She was smiling and willingly doing yoga. Although they had only learnt shavasana, correct breathing, a little pawanmuktasana and had been shown surya namaskara, we had played yoga games which the children had fun with. In fact, they taught me a yoga game!

Another example was a group of boys who were being taught yoga as part of the school curriculum. One had ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), two had ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder), another had repressed anger issues, one had one parent in correctional facilities, one had a parent issued with a court order to stay away, one had an abusive step-parent living with them. They all had behavioural problems and came to yoga class not on their own volition but because the teacher or parent wanted them to do yoga. They would stand to one side with crossed arms, head on one side, chin in the air, refusing to join in unless the mechanics of yoga was explained. Although all wanted to know this, a couple of boys did not mind doing yoga and started to do yoga poses when instructed without a fuss. However, two of the boys started to fuss and demand an explanation or say that yoga was a sissy thing. Peer pressure kicked in and all the boys suddenly agreed that an explanation of benefits and how yoga affected the brain and body were necessary before they agreed to do yoga.

How would it (yoga) get them to behave better or get A's in school? After this was explained and understood by the boys they joined in. The games especially helped. Three weeks later, a couple of these boys enquired as to how, if yoga was supposed to improve their grades and help them get A's, they still got C's. They were told that practising yoga on a regular basis and doing this over a period of time were factors to take into account as well. Learning becomes easier and remembering too, when yoga is done every day. However, when this incident was narrated to my daughter, she immediately piped up and said, "Mom, you need to tell them to study as well!"

The boys accepted yoga and continued to come, less defiant and not so eager to find fault. These same boys who were very uncooperative and mischievous, subject to peer pressure (which is a complete subject on its own), actually came through when it came to the crunch and help was needed several times. They offered assistance gladly and happily and were very chivalrous. They became kinder, developed a sense of humour, were more considerate to peers and adults and nurturing to younger children.

Another example was of a kindergartner, who looked an absolute angel with big, bright, dark eyes, petite, hair around her head like a halo, the sweetest of smiles, who came to the yoga class in a public school. Most of the children who came to this yoga class were there mainly for behavioural problems or excessive ADHD. One look at her and the thought occurred that this little girl must want to come to yoga, as it was inconceivable that this angel had any kind of behavioural problem. I was not told the problem. She came for yoga for an entire semester. Om chanting, pranayama and yoga nidra (children's version) were all she would join in. Yoga asanas she would not do. She would run and hide after chanting *Om* and magically reappear for pranayama and yoga nidra. Yet, when it came to playing yoga games, either using the yoga CD on the laptop or some of the games mentioned below, this little girl knew all the answers and poses. Even the other children

who participated in doing the poses and were attentive were astounded. They would say to her, “How do you know? You weren’t even there doing yoga. We did all these poses and were paying attention and we don’t remember. How do you know the correct answers?” She answered very simply, “I listened!”

Later, it was revealed to me that this little girl used to bite severely or cut teachers, other children and herself with scissors. I was told that the times she came for yoga and during that particular semester her behaviour improved and was modified. She had stopped biting and using scissors to hurt herself and others. That was over a year ago. The school only had yoga for one semester. There are no updates on her current behaviour.

Objective

It is not just a question of remembering the pose step by step, but also of remembering the benefits, precautions, awareness points, anatomy and the anatomical systems, the different pranayama techniques, the effects on the body and mind, as well as safety issues. All this could get overwhelming. This is where yoga games at the end of the class come in. There are many and a variety of ways. This perspective is viewed from actually knowing yoga.

The objective, from the perspective of the benefit to the child, is the actual experiencing of yoga. Yoga brings into balance the physical, emotional and mental personality of the child. The right and left hemispheres of the brain are brought into balance. Yoga also helps with the removal of negative and harmful effects of trauma. Emotional anguish, which the child has known in the past and present, needs to be dealt with and eliminated in a manner appropriate and suitable to his or her formative years.

Also, most of the children were from families of low income, with very little education. The parents or adults in their lives were tired and overworked with very little time for the child. The majority of parents had also come from dysfunctional

homes, ignorant of the healthy caring and nurturing of a child. Information was given to the child through games regarding diet and nutrition, hygiene and yoga. The child then inadvertently taught their parents, especially where diet was concerned. The children also taught their parents poses and pranayama techniques and their benefits if the parent suffered from a particular ailment or had a headache. The children ended up educating their parents and started to take responsibility and an interest in their own welfare. This in turn rubbed off on the parents as they became aware of their children's knowledge of what was good for them and what was not, and so it was difficult for the parent to slide into old and bad habits with their kids on their heels keeping tabs on them.

Subject: Yoga games

1. The Wall Game
2. Safari game
3. Bug, bug, frog
4. Yes/No (Hop forward, hop backward)
5. Om says
6. Statues
7. Pizza or cake game
8. Peanut butter & jelly sandwich
9. Eensy weensy spider
10. One, Two, Three, Hari Om
11. Who is the Guru?

Procedure

1. The Wall game: This game is especially loved by all children. They get to test their knowledge. For some reason they find this highly appealing and fun.

The kids are lined up against a wall. The yoga teacher is at the opposite wall. Questions to do with yoga are asked by the yoga teacher and one or all of the kids answer these. Or they are asked to demonstrate a pose or pranayama technique. For every correct answer they take one to four steps forward, depending upon the difficulty of the question. For every wrong

answer they take one step back. The aim is to get to the wall where the teacher is standing. Another way to move forward is to reproduce one of the practices done in the class, e.g. after the Trip to the Yoga Zoo, they need to remember and reproduce the asanas of the animals they saw there.

A sample of questions:

- i) When is the best time to do yoga?
- ii) Is it okay to eat just before doing yoga?
- iii) For a healthy spine and possibly getting taller which asana would we do?
- iv) For stretching the leg muscles and a flexible hip joint would the half butterfly and full butterfly poses help?
- v) Please demonstrate the above.
- vi) What are the precautions?
- vii) Do we have to be vegetarian to do yoga?
- viii) Is there something which improves memory?
- ix) Name some relaxation poses?
- x) Can you name or demonstrate a good pose for the digestion of food?
- xi) Demonstrate the pose for one of the animals you saw at the Yoga Zoo.
- xii) Demonstrate the pose for one of the animals seen in the Aviary.

These are some of the questions that can be used for the game. By now the children are really trying to get to the wall first, taking big steps forward and tiny ones back. They can be corrected and this brought to their attention every now and then as a joke. The emphasis is, however, on reinforcing or teaching yoga asanas, pranayama, benefits, precautions, yamas and niyamas.

The enormous fun the kids have helps accomplish this. Keeping the competition with each other out of it is a great way for the kids who did not know the answers to learn and get it right the next time and not feel bad about not knowing or getting it wrong or dread playing this game. They know it is okay to learn from one's mistakes and the pressure of having to get it right is not there. The kids relax. When

relaxation occurs it is easier to learn. Initially, until they get to be relatively at the same level, they are all told to come forward or go back together.

2. The Safari game: The yoga teacher asks the children to imagine they are in a jungle or the bush. Twenty steps in *tadasana* – an enchanted forest where the vegetation is on the move, then either after the twenty steps or during, the kids are asked to listen carefully for sounds of birds, animals, reptiles and see them in their imagination. An animal commonly found in that environment and which pose the kids are familiar with, is called out and the children have to go into that pose, e.g. a tiger is called out for the jungle habitat and they do *vyaghrasana* (tiger pose). They continue to walk in *tadasana* after this until another animal is called out by either the kids in turn or by the teacher – sometimes the kids are shy; within five to ten minutes or until the majority of the children's requests have been catered to (depending upon time available).

This game allows the children's imagination to be unleashed, encourages creativity and is like a yoga nidra with movement. Children can be vocal as well – imitating animal sounds. It is a good game for children with acute ADD or behavioural problems: it allows them to get used to the poses and the idea of yoga and can be used to gradually ease such children into an actual disciplined yoga class. Care, as far as safety goes, still needs to be used when playing this game with such children: children should not push each other or fall or crawl on each other or bite or claw or kick or box each other when doing the animal asanas and mimicking the animals, reptiles, birds, amphibians or fish.

3. Bug, bug, frog: A combination of *namaskarasana* (salutation pose) and the Indian game 'kho', with some similarity to 'duck, duck, goose' in the US. This asana, and other such squatting asanas, is one which a majority of children find difficult to do. This game helps them do the pose. The kids are not straining or using undue effort when playing the game performing *namaskarasana*. Their

attention is upon the game and they do namaskarasana effortlessly. Yet, when they are asked to do this pose in a yoga class, when not playing the game, they groan and complain and sometimes cannot even squat properly; they are partially standing. But, when asked to go into namaskarasana for the game, all this is forgotten and they sit in the asana with ease. This asana, when done in the four stages, helps with developing concentration. It is also excellent for the nerves of the thighs, knees, shoulders, arms and neck and with the flexibility of the hips. The awareness of body movement and the breathing process and their conjunction is brought to the attention of the child.

Sitting in namaskarasana stage 1 (head straight), the children form a straight line with gaps in between. One child faces one direction and the next child in the opposite direction and so on. These are the frogs. One child or the teacher starts the game off at one end of the line of children, walking down the line to the other end and then back on the other side. This person is the bug. As this is being done, the word 'bug' is called out behind each child squatting. When the word 'frog' is called out, the child squatting (a frog) completes stage 1 of the asana and goes into stage 3, then gets up and runs after the 'bug'. The aim of the bug is to run to the frog's place in the line and the aim of the frog is to tag the bug before this can happen. They can only run in one direction (the same direction as the bug was walking) and the bug can only occupy the vacant spot in the line facing the same direction as the frog was facing. If the bug gets tagged before reaching the frog's spot, then the bug has to go again and the frog has to occupy the same vacated spot.

Children have a lot of fun with this. It can get quite rambunctious, especially when playing this game with children who have repressed anger and behaviour problems. In this case, one has to be careful and make sure this game is introduced later when they have had a considerable amount of yoga lessons, thus ensuring no one gets rough housed,

tagged too vigorously or tackled. The surroundings should be clear of furniture and safe with no hazards. It is ideally played on carpeted or level grassy areas.

It can be played just before the children need to be doing something quiet or after they have been quiet. It helps release pent-up emotions and nervous energy. It helps with channelling energy. Vayu nishkasana (wind releasing pose) also comes into this game a little bit – getting up and down from a squatting position

4. **Yes/No:** This game is played by the children of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, at Bihar Yoga Bharati, Munger, as ‘Hop forward, hop backward’. Everyone stands in rows and columns. The children need to monitor themselves. When the sequence is followed incorrectly, they need to quietly sit down. There should be enough space between each child. The yoga teacher or a child (once they get the hang of yes/no) calls out a sequence of ‘yes’ and ‘no’. When ‘yes’ is called out, the child hops forward. When ‘no’ is called out, the child hops back. To begin with, a sequence of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are called out, four to five altogether, e.g. “Yes, yes, no, no.” The children accordingly jump forward twice and backwards twice for the two ‘yes’s’ and two ‘no’s’. Then another sequence of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are called out. These can get called out faster and can get longer. Each child can take turns to call out a sequence. Anyone who gets this sequence wrong sits down. The game continues until the last one or two are left standing.

The Yes/No game is a lot of fun and gets a lot of giggles. The children find this game challenging and it soon gets to be a favourite.

This is not a good game for very young children (six years and below) as they are unable to combine the forward and back movement with the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’. It requires a lot of patience from the yoga teacher if playing this game with very young children and a lot of practising this game with young kids. They will do it incorrectly. Ignore the wrong movements. If the children notice that they got the sequence wrong, and they sit down, it is okay. Avoid bringing attention to the young

child who is unaware that he/she is doing the wrong movement and wrong sequence. This only confuses them further. The yoga teacher/parent should continue doing the correct movements for the sequence called out. Eventually, they get it and love the game. Perhaps not the first time around, but the second or third time the game is played.

Adding to this game is a possibility. The words ‘but’, ‘if’, ‘now’, ‘later’ and some other words can be added for a movement to the right or left, or diagonally forward to the right or left, or diagonally back to the right or left. This can get very complicated and the children need to be a lot older. If all the words are introduced too early, or all at one time, or if they are not ready, it can be confusing, discouraging and intimidating. But after playing this game several times and they get to be experts at this, generally they will come up with these other words themselves.

Another way to deal with this problem is to play it as seen at BYMM, using the words ‘hop forward’, ‘hop backward’, ‘hop left’, ‘hop right’, then it is easier for even the very young to follow the game. For younger children it is easier for them if the teacher calls out ‘hop forward’, ‘hop backward’, ‘hop to right’, ‘hop to left’, ‘hop forward right’, etc.

The game is good for the motor part of the brain; coordinating movements quickly with words called out calls for the entire brain being brought into balance. The child becomes alert and attentive; concentration and focus also develop. The thinking process speeds up. The nervous system too is affected – the messaging part; the firing of the neurons. An efficient and healthy nervous system is maintained.

5. Om Says: This game, too, is played at Bihar Yoga Bharati, Munger, by the bal yogis. It is basically the same as ‘Simon Says’ except that the word ‘*Om*’ replaces ‘Simon’. Along with body parts and movements, yoga poses may be included, nothing too complicated or strenuous or contorted for safety reasons.

Example: The yoga teacher or a child faces the group of children and says “*Om* says to touch your nose”, “*Om* says

touch the chin”, “*Om* says touch your ear”, “*Om* says touch your nose”, “Touch your chin.” The group has to do each of these instructions only when the word ‘*Om*’ is used and those who do not or do the movement when *Om* is not used are out of the game. Each child monitors herself or himself. The instructions need to be rattled off quickly, clearly and be audible by all.

The qualities of listening and awareness are developed along with motor skills. The left and right brain are also brought into balance. It improves the ability to think fast and process quickly. It requires the child to be alert and attentive.

6. **Statues:** This game is similar to ‘Red Light, Green Light’. Except when it is red light, the child goes into a yoga pose requiring balance or holding a pose.

The parent or teacher is facing away from the children. At the other end of the space the children are lined up facing the back of the teacher. The kids then walk or run quickly towards the teacher, prepared to stop and freeze into a pose when this is called out by the teacher/parent. The teacher turns towards the children, calling out a pose: either one that requires balance or one that can be held easily. The children have to become a statue in that pose. Anyone who moves, or gets into the incorrect pose, or is not yet in the pose, is out of the game, has to go back to the starting point or move five paces back (depending upon the time available).

Balancing poses are good for young children who need to develop bladder control and for bringing about physical, mental and emotional balance. Benefits are not just physical; it also induces one-pointedness where focus and concentration are concerned.

The benefits for a pose being held will be the ones specific to that particular pose.

This game requires the children to respond quickly and change instantly from movement to stillness. It can be played with a small or large repertoire of poses. As with the Wall game, remembering the pose accurately is reinforced.

For choosing the poses to be called out, safety should be an issue here. The children need to be told to keep arms-length space between them and this needs to be monitored constantly as children tend to cluster together.

7. Pizza or Cake Game: This game can be used in the beginning as part of pawanmuktasana – gayatmak meru vakrasana (dynamic spinal twist) is used for this. It is an energy releasing asana, good for trimming the waistline, lateral movements of the spinal column, digestive organs and digestion.

Sitting in a circle on the floor, legs spread out and near the foot of the adjacent person on either side, thus forming a pizza pan or cake pan. The arms are raised straight out to the sides. The left hand is raised behind the body to reach for a pizza or cake ingredient, whilst the right hand reaches for the toes of the left foot and the body is twisting to the left. Another ingredient is similarly reached for when making the movement to the right. This continues until you have all the ingredients. The children can also call out the ingredients. Chakki chalanasana (churning the mill), excellent for healthy nerves and muscles of the pelvis and abdomen, and kashtha takshanasana (chopping wood), good for the muscles of the back and for straightening the spinal column, can be utilized for mixing ingredients or spreading tomato sauce and cheese on the pizza or for chopping up ingredients.

When making the pizza dough, imagination can be used: when throwing the dough up into the air with the emphasis on the movement back for the dynamic spinal twist, catching the pizza dough with the emphasis on the movement forward, reaching for the toes. Pretending to sometimes miss with the dough landing on the face of the teacher is a big hit with the children. They find this hilarious.

When all the ingredients have been placed on the pizza pie or cake, it is placed in the oven. Both arms are raised above the head and paschimottanasana is performed, closing the oven door. The teacher can comment on how good it smells. When it is baked, they then open the oven door by sitting up and bringing the hands to the knees.

When the pizza or cake is cooked they get to eat it with the legs becoming a giant mouth. The legs move towards each other and the pizza or cake is chomped up.

The cake can be decorated further before eating, with icing, cake sprinkles, etc., depending upon the time you wish to spend on this.

After the cake or pizza has been eaten, one hand pats the top of the head and the other rubs the abdomen in a circular movement. This is then reversed. The children are told what a good job they did (patting the top of the head) and yummy (rubbing the tummy)!

8. Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich: Paschimottanasana (hairpin pose) and pawanmuktasana part one are used in Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich. (You may use any other ingredients.) Sitting with the legs together straight out on the floor, reach up or back for peanut butter and move forward to touch the toes to spread the peanut butter on the toes. The toes can be flexed forward and back as in padanguli naman (toe bending) and massaged by the fingers using mushtika bandhana (hand clenching). Reaching up again to get more peanut butter and leaning forward to apply this on the feet doing goolf naman (ankle bending). Continue with this, working up the legs.

Do similar movements with jelly being applied on the top half of the body and arms. Manibandha naman (wrist bending) and manibandha chakra (wrist joint rotation) can be included. When the ingredients are spread on the slices of bread (the legs, arms and body), then for a final time do gatyatmak paschimottanasana. Children of all ages love this. Although the older kids may mumble that it is too babyish, they still like this and are thoroughly amused by it. This is a good one for younger kids, especially for those being introduced to yoga for the first time and not very familiar with yoga.

Sometimes, a child will say that this is our body and not slices of bread and there is not any peanut butter or jelly. To this they are asked to imagine: "Can you see this as a picture

in the space in front of you?” If they are persistent with saying no to imagining the bread and peanut butter and jelly, then they do not have to imagine it and can either not do it, if they are uncomfortable with it, or they can just have fun and go along with it, knowing it to be parts of the body and air. They can switch to naming parts of the body and including the breath, teaching the child the asana in the traditional way. Look directly at the child when doing this and at the other children when playing the game. The child will appreciate this and realize that the yoga teacher is not gaga.

The benefits for the game are the same as for the actual poses involved.

12. **Eensy Weensy Spider:** Sing the nursery rhyme ‘Eensy Weensy Spider’ together with the young children who wish to sing along:

Eensy weensy spider climbed up the garden spout.

Along came the rain and washed the spider out.

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain

And eensy weensy spider climbed up the spout again.

When the spider is climbing the water spout perform rajju karshanasana (pulling the rope), kashtha takshanasana (chopping wood) when the rain comes down and gatyatmak meru vakrasana for the spider being washed out. Perform a version of the same asana, mimicking the movement of the sun moving across the sky for the sun coming out. Reverse kashtha takshanasana for the rain drying up and rajju karshanasana for the spider climbing up again. This method can be used to introduce the pose to children who are young and not familiar with yoga.

This can also be used to break the ice with older kids. Children with good self-esteem respond to this better than children coming from an abusive background. Generally, if using with older children, girls will respond to this better than boys.

9. **One, Two Three, Hari Om:** The Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal find this game simple but challenging. In this game the

children should stand or sit in a circle. It is decided who will start the numbering and they will call out 'one'. The child on their right then calls out 'two', to his right calls out 'three', to his right calls out 'Hari Om', to his right calls out 'five', then the next one calls 'six', then 'seven', then 'Hari Om' again. Every fourth player has to call out 'Hari Om' instead of a number. If they call out the number, they have to drop out of the circle.

This game is lots of fun and helps to develop concentration and attention. If you are not familiar or are uncomfortable with 'Hari Om', you may say, 'So Ham', the natural breath mantra, or '1, 2, 3 hello' instead. It can even be '1, 2, Hari Om, 4, 5, Hari Om', or '1, 2, 3, 4, Hari Om, 6, 7, 8, 9, Hari Om'.

10. Who is the Guru?: This is another fun game played by the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal in Munger. In this game the children are usually seated in a circle, on the floor or outdoors on the grass if possible. Someone is chosen to remove themselves from earshot of the others and a leader is chosen. All the others in the circle try to watch the leader as closely as possible without looking directly at that person. The leader (the guru) will begin some movements, e.g. bending ankles forward and back, and everyone tries to begin as soon as possible after the movement begins. The one chosen to guess 'Who is the Guru?' is called back to the circle and they have to decide who is the guru. The leader will change, perhaps from ankles forward and back to ankle rotations, and everyone watching indirectly tries to change at the same time so that it is hard to tell who changed the movements. This goes on to other movements until the person guesses correctly who the guru is or it can be decided beforehand the number of guesses allowed.

This helps to develop awareness and concentration. When used with large numbers of children, it becomes more difficult to determine who is the guru. Of course, the exercises themselves also have value for the physical body.

Conclusion

Yoga games have been found to be very helpful tools for teaching yoga to children. They are stimulating and memorable for children. Facts, which otherwise may be found boring or too much for the brain to hold on to, are recalled easily because of having done this in one of the games.

At a deeper level, children's neuroses, issues, traumas can surface and sometimes get sorted out as a result of doing yoga in games. Swami Satyananda's instructions, along with Swami Sivananda's and Swami Niranjanananda's, are the guidelines and should be followed when incorporating yoga into games.

Perhaps you, the reader, can come up with some games of your own, keeping the above in mind. Please share these with us if you do so.

Swami Satyananda has always said that, so long as a child is not harming herself or himself or another or under any danger, the child should be allowed to do what she or he wants. Forcing or constantly correcting a child should be avoided, along with 'don't' and 'no'.

Yoga games are a way for the child to be herself or himself, drawing out the child slowly and gently. Some personalities, of course, may not be suitable for yoga games, although I have yet to come across a child who flat out refused to join in and did not end up enjoying the yoga game. Sometimes parents feel that these games are childish and that a more mature and suitable dissemination method should be used. This attitude, however, shows unresolved issues the parent has. Both methods of teaching: traditional and yoga games, can be used in one class; either mixing the game in or at the beginning or at the end.

Swami Sivananda would say to retain the child within – to be childlike and not childish.

18

Row Your Boat: A Class Idea

Maria Capurro

Objectives

- Awareness of a correct posture
- Awareness of the process of breathing
- Development of the inner senses
- Group work
- Language: introducing new vocabulary: boat, sea, water, sun.

Materials

- One pre-made paper boat for each child
- Crayons, markers or colour pencils
- Song: 'Row, row, row your boat.'

Description

1. **Yama – Living Together:** Children sit down on the floor making a circle. Massage in circle: children turn to the right side and massage the friend's back at the same time they receive a massage. Ask them to move their hands slowly as if they were touching water. Then they turn left and repeat the same.

2. **Nyama – Cleaning the House:** Ask children to move their joints, ankles, shoulders and neck. Ask them to move their arms as if they were swimming.

3. **Asana – Alignment of the Spine:** Children are still sitting on the floor with legs comfortably crossed. Give each

child a paper boat. Ask them to place it on their head. They stay still for some seconds, feeling their breath with the spine straight.

Nauka sanchalana (rowing the boat): Sitting in a base position with legs outstretched in front of the body. Make movements as if rowing the boat. Inhale as you go forward and exhale as you go backwards

4. **Pranayama – Develop Awareness of Breathing:**

Children lie on the back, placing the paper boat on their tummies. The spinal column is straight and the arms rest on the floor with the palms upward. They inhale and exhale softly, then they inhale and exhale deeply. In this way, they become aware of their breathing process and observe the movements in their tummies as the air goes in and out.

5. **Pratyahara – Relaxation:** Read the following story:

Imagine you get into your paper boat . . .

It's not a paper boat any more, it's a big strong wooden boat.

You are sailing across a quiet sea. It is warm, the sun is shining.

You touch the water with your hand, it's very fresh.

You listen to the seagulls, which are flying over your head.

You smell the fresh air. You are very hot now so you dive into the water and you swim.

Now you get into your boat again.

It is a small paper boat again and it needs to be painted.

Very slowly you start moving your hands and your body and you open your eyes.

6. **Dharana – Concentration:** Children paint and decorate their paper boats, using crayons, markers or any other technique and then place them on a big blue paper which will represent the sea. All the boats will be sailing together. Sing together:

Row, row, row your boat

Gently down the stream.

*Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.*

7. Dhyana – Absorption: As the children become absorbed in their activity, which in this session is being centred around water, boats, singing and painting, usually they become very spontaneous and creative when they become deeply involved in the activity. Dhyana is technically speaking an extension of dharana.

Variations

1. **A Different Ending:** Ask the children to make a big boat using the elements they have in the room. Chairs, tables, blankets etc. They all get inside the boat and sing the song.

2. **Yama:** Give each child a white paper and crayons. When the music starts they move their crayons following the music. When the music stops they give their sheet to the person sitting on the right and continue colouring the one they receive. Stop the music many times and use different types of music. Ask children to use the right hand, the left hand and both hands at the same time. Use this paper to fold the paper boats. This variation is more suitable for older children (seven years or more) because sometimes it is not easy for pre-schoolers to fold the boat in the correct way and they need a lot of help.

19

Yoga Classes as Stories

Sannyasi Nawaratri and Swami Vimalratna Saraswati

... yoga is a form of complete education that can be used with all children because it develops physical stamina, emotional stability and intellectual and creative talents. It is a unified system for developing the balanced, total personality of the child.

—Rishi Arundhati Saraswati

Yoga Education for Children, Volume One

The *Panchatantra* stories discuss and show children appropriate behaviour in a non-threatening manner, without lecturing or speaking down to the child. In Sanskrit the word *pancha* means ‘five’ and *tantra* ‘action’. The *Panchatantra* are to do with the five senses – the perception and application; living life not at the gross level, but from the higher consciousness. The children are exposed to all these via stories which have animals or inanimate objects as characters (the start of cartoons perhaps?) and sometimes people as well.

Traditionally, yoga includes guidelines for social and personal behaviour. These are known as *yama* and *niyama*. They are particularly emphasized in the *raja yoga* of Sage Patanjali. The *yama* and *niyama* of *raja yoga* are:

1. *Yamas*:
 - i) *Ahimsa* (non-violence)
 - ii) *Satya* (truthfulness)
 - iii) *Asteya* (honesty)

- iv) *Brahmacharya* (sensual abstinence)
 - v) *Aparigraha* (non-acquisitiveness)
2. Niyamas:
- i) *Shaucha* (cleanliness)
 - ii) *Santosha* (contentment)
 - iii) *Tapas* (austerity)
 - iv) *Swadhyaya* (self-study)
 - v) *Ishwara Pranidhana* (intense devotion and surrender to the Divine.)

These qualities can be developed in children through stories which incorporate yoga practices, such as asanas. Many of the yogasanas are based on nature, especially animals, making it easy to weave a story around performance of the asanas. All cultures have their own versions of the Panchatantras, stories used to instil ethical and moral behaviour in children's minds. Such stories provide a wealth of material for yoga teachers to draw on.

How the Panchatantra stories began

The beginning: Long, long time ago.

A king lived a very long time ago, and was famous far and wide for being a wise, kind, just ruler in his kingdom. The people loved him! His kingdom prospered and his subjects prospered. Happiness and good health were the attributes of all.

The king had three children who one day would rule his kingdom. But, these three children had no interest in being kings – because it involved not only studying and exercising and in knowing and learning about art, music, theatre, but also knowing true education – “perceiving a higher purpose apart from this”, especially being able to live as per the laws of dharma, the yamas and niyamas. A part of this was listening to people, to what they had to say, their problems and knowing how to rule wisely, judiciously and with compassion.

This made the king sad. He wondered what would be the fate of his kingdom and its people. He loved his children dearly and he also loved the people in his kingdom.

He hoped there was something he could do. He did not know how to teach all these subtle concepts of life to his children.

The king heard of a very wise and well known guru of the time, Vishnusarnam. He had an idea. (BING!)

King: May I bring my three children to you? Would you please teach them how to be excellent kings?

Guru: Yes, certainly I can try.

So, the king took his three children to the guru who lived far from the royal palace and in the forest with trees, flowers, fruit, animals and birds of the forest for company.

The guru taught the children yoga. The three children did yoga every day. At 6.00 every morning, they washed and got clean first and then learnt yoga, ate some fruits, then they were ready to start their studies of math, science, geography, history, world affairs, languages, astronomy, art, music, drama. At first they did not want to, this was a struggle, but after doing yoga for a couple of months every day, they soon changed to being eager to know about the world around them and themselves.

In the afternoon the guru told the three children stories. These stories weren't just ordinary stories, they were special stories. How do you teach children the rights and wrongs of ruling a kingdom? How can one teach wisdom, kindness and to be just and caring? Self control? Performing the right actions, think right thoughts, feel right feelings? These are extremely difficult topics to teach. But, the guru had an idea: he used stories where the characters were animals, trees, rivers, mountains, the sky, birds, reptiles and people.

Through these stories, yoga and studies the children learned to be fantastic kings and, in their turn, were famous the world over for their kingdom and leadership.

The king was thrilled with his three children. The problem which he had was no longer an issue. His three children and the people of their kingdom were going to be just fine.

The end and the beginning.

Stories for yogasana practice

This method of teaching is particularly effective for six to nine year olds.

A location or setting is important to establish as it helps create the imaginary world in which events take place. Examples of good locations include: a forest with lots of animals, a big house with many different rooms where lots of discoveries can be made, an island, a magic land, the circus, a strange distant country, the ocean, a farm, the desert, another planet (there can be many different types of planets, with potentially a different one each week), or a journey into space. Stories that are a little bit scary are popular; however, it is good if the story emphasizes the positive capacity of the children to overcome monsters and danger. The zoo, nursery rhymes, traditional children's stories, a walk in the mountains, and a trip to the beach are all commonly used. Once there is a location, children this age typically have no trouble immersing themselves in the experience – and then everything is possible. It is possible to contain the asana, pranayama and yoga nidra sections of the class all within the story.

It is useful to consider each story as containing several smaller sequences based around yoga capsules. These smaller mini stories are arranged according to the needs of the current story. This allows for repetition and development of key practices each week but with plenty of room for variety. For example: *tadasana*, *tiriyaka tadasana* and *kati chakrasana*; *pawanmuktasana* 1, 2 and 3; and *surya namaskara*.

Tadasana, tiriyaka tadasana, kati chakrasana (TTK): This mini sequence can be a tree under the influence of different weather. When there is no wind it is *tadasana*. When there is a breeze there is *tiriyaka tadasana*. When there is a storm there is *kati chakrasana*. It might be a palm tree or it might be a tall forest tree. Most classes can usually find space for a tree or a forest. TTK could also be a rocket at different stages of flight. *Utthanasana* works well for landings. Picking fruit works well stretching up to the high fruit for *tadasana*,

side to side for tiriya tadasana, and reaching around to the back for kati chakrasana. Utthanasana is helpful for the fruit that are a bit low. The TTKU sequence can also be a crazy monkey moving its body around.

Pawanmuktasana part one (PM1): A versatile way to introduce PM1 is to describe it as a suit of some kind that is necessary for this class's particular story. It could be armour, it could be a space suit, it could be a diving suit, it could be beautiful clothes and jewellery. It could be an invisibility suit. It could be any sort of uniform. It can be a form of protection, a form of strength, and reinforce self-esteem in some way. The body rotation at the end of the class can also be used to remove this suit. The story below is an example. It can be a story in itself or it could be used as part of a larger story.

A boy (or girl or group of children) was walking by a river. He heard cries for help. It was an old woman and she was drowning in the river. He dived in and rescued her. After he had pulled her to the bank, and coughed up some water, she was very grateful.

She said, "Even though I don't know much about swimming, I am actually a great magician. Because you have saved my life I will give you a gift. What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I want to be a warrior".

"Very well, as a warrior you will need armour to protect yourself. I will give you invisible armour that nothing can penetrate. You will be safe in any battle. You will need to put this armour on every day after you get up in the morning. I will show you how to put on the armour.

It requires a series of secret movements. This armour covers every part of the body beginning with the toes.

You begin by moving the toes backward and forward seven times. (Count out loud together. Sound effects when the magic armour comes into place.)

Now the ankles are rotated seven times in each direction.

Now the knees are moved back and forward seven times.

Now the legs are moved up and down seven times.

With these movements the lower half of the body is protected.

Next the fingers are stretched and then made into fists, seven times.

Now the wrists are rotated seven times in both directions.

Now raise and lower the arms, bending the elbows, seven times.

With these movements the hands and arms are protected.

Now rotate the arms seven times in both directions with the fingertips on the shoulders. This will protect the shoulders, chest, abdomen and back.

Now the neck and head will also be protected with a series of secret movements.

The first movement for the neck and head is to lower the head to the chest and then raise it. Move it back and forward. This protects the body from attack from the front and behind.

The second movement is to bend the head sideways and lower the ear towards the shoulders, first on one side and then the other. This protects from attack from the sides and you will always hear the enemy approach.

The third movement is to turn the head to the right and the left. This gives protection from attack from a distance and you will always see your enemy as far as the horizon.

The fourth movement involved moving the head in a circle, very slowly, in both directions. This gives protection from above and below. You will be wary of traps and know in advance of trouble from above.

Now your whole body is protected. As long as you remember to put this armour on every day in the morning before you go to battle you won't ever be defeated.

Also, if you have a friend who needs to be covered in this invisible armour, show him/her how to do it and remind them that they should put it on every day for maximum protection."

Once the armour is on, everyone is ready to go on an adventure. The armour may be removed before the end of the class with another magic sequence – the body rotation.

Surya namaskara: Children are able to learn surya namaskara very quickly when it is contained in a story like the one below. This story is a very liberal adaptation of a traditional story about Gayatri. Surya namaskara could be part of each class's story or it could be included each week as a separate self-contained story.

Brother and sister sun – surya namaskara and gayatri mantra:
There was a brother and a sister and they had an important role to play in the world. It was their job to become the sun each day and bring light and warmth to the world. One day the sister would be the sun and the brother would play, and the next day the brother would be the sun and the sister would play.

They slept on the moon as this made travelling each day easier. In the morning they would get up and this is what they would do each day:

When it was the sister's turn to be the sun, the brother would hold her dear to his heart (khada pranamasana), then lift her up into the sky (hasta utthanasana) and she would spend the day going through the sky looking down on the earth. The brother would come down to earth (pada hastasana). He would ride his horse around (ashwa sanchalanasana). He would ride over the mountains (parvatasana). Everywhere he went he would enjoy the sunlight, knowing it was his sister who was keeping him warm. When he got too hot he would go swimming and he would dive into pools of cool water (ashtanga pranamasana/bhujangasana). In the afternoon he would go back over the mountain and he would ride his horse from the earth home to the moon. Then he would reach up into the sky, take his sister from the sky, and bring her back close to his heart.

The next day it would be the brother's turn to be the sun and travel across the sky and the sister would play on the earth in the sunlight. In the morning she would hold her brother dear to her heart, then lift her brother into the sky. He would float up high above and she would come down to earth. She would ride her horse. She would cross the mountains.

Everywhere she went she would enjoy the sunlight, knowing it was her brother who was keeping her warm. If she got too hot, she would go swimming and she would dive into pools of cool water. In the afternoon, she would go back over the mountains and she would ride her horse from the earth home to the moon. Then she would reach up into the sky and take her brother from the sky and bring him back close to her heart.

First thing in the morning, and in the evening when they came back together, there was a song to the sun that they sang together:

*Om bhurbhuvah suvah
Tatsaviturvarenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat.*

20

The Art of Yoga

Sannyasi Bhaktipushpa

Introduction

Teaching children yoga along with the principles of Fine Art, in this case drawing and painting, is an idea which I am in the process of exploring with the help of some young, eager and willing volunteers.

This idea grew out of my experience with:

1. The profound effect yoga has had on my work as a painter.
2. A deepening understanding, through personal experience and through the shared knowledge of art educators, of ways in which these principles of drawing and painting can be taught to others, providing them with the tools to express their own innate creativity.
3. The imagination of a little six-year-old girl, Sabria, who, during a spontaneous session of creative visualization, described this wonderful interior house she saw in her mind, made of candy with “sweet water flowing curtains.”
4. Reading *Yoga Education For Children, Volume One*, which introduced me to the concept and presentation of yoga in a way that could be included in activities for the early development of children, through education and play, facilitating the balanced focus on all aspects of the child – physical, mental, emotional, creative and spiritual, to help them express themselves fully.

Through both art and yoga, I have come to realize that there is a world of colour, symbols and imagery within us at every level of our being, from the outer more gross level to the innermost subtle levels, which we consciously and unconsciously respond to. I will give a few examples.

On an outer level, if you were to stare for some time at a square of purple colour and then shift your gaze to a blank white wall, do you know what colour would appear before your eyes? You would see the complementary colour to purple, which is yellow. If you were to stare at a blue square and then shift your gaze, the complementary colour, orange, would appear, and if you were to stare at a square of red colour, green would appear. Our mind automatically produces this seemingly important internal colour balance.

As a final year art student, my classmates and I were transferred to a new location where the 'painting room' had every conceivable range of primary colours, i.e. red, blue and yellow, either on the walls, the doors, the floor and fixtures. Without understanding why, we all started painting in shades of brown, until a colour psychologist reminded us that mixing together these primary colours would produce shades of brown, so, in actuality we were doing this with paint, to balance ourselves in our environment. Subsequently, the room had to be painted white, and we all felt comfortable mixing varied colours again.

On more subtle levels, our dreams speak to us in the language of colourful images. On an even deeper level the chakras, as have been revealed to us by those souls who have gained access to this realm, have definite colours and symbolic patterns which play their role in the transformational quality of these chakras. We have worlds upon worlds of colour, symbols and images within us, yet we go through life not having full access to this part of ourselves. There is always an internal beginning with any outward creative expression.

I have observed that the many practices of yoga inherently have the keys to open the doors to our interior world, strengthening our awareness and ability to gain access to this

part of ourselves. This gradually leads us directly to the source of inspiration, which is the ultimate in creativity, where the artist becomes the channel for images that edify, teach and heal.

Some of the invaluable yoga practices include:

- Chanting the mantra 'Aum' before starting any project, to acknowledge the presence of the creative power, from where all ideas and inspiration come.
- Asana and pranayama, to balance and still any restlessness in the body and mind; a vital requirement for creative endeavours which demand long hours of being in one place to complete a painting, sculpture, etc.
- Trataka, so invaluable in helping to develop concentration and focus needed to perfect sometimes tedious details that are essential to bring the work to completion.
- Yoga nidra and chidakasha dharana, helping to clear any psychological blocks that would impede the creative process, while at the same time allowing images, that can be therapeutic if expressed creatively, to surface.
- Antar mouna, to help develop the qualities of observation and awareness necessary for an artist.
- Creative visualization, to help access the wonderful unlimited world of our imagination.

With the help of these and many other yogic practices, the body and mind are prepared for expressing creativity. Combine this with learning in a simple way such drawing and painting skills as:

- Exercises to develop proper 'seeing' for drawing purposes.
- Contour drawing, to train the mind to relate to the hand, the subtle changes in the shape of an object.
- Colour mixing, to give the ability to mix the exact colour you want, without having to depend on buying a particular tube of paint.
- Perspective, to create a three-dimensional depth.
- Negative and positive space, to create an interesting composition where all aspects of the image support each other as either the dominant or surrounding shape.

With these and other creative ‘tools’ it is easier to express outwardly the inner creative stirrings.

The lessons presented here were for the most part created especially in keeping with the theme of the Yoga Magic Carpet Rides™, which seeks to facilitate a greater understanding between different cultures.

Yoga may be seen in these lessons to be a silent partner, almost in the form of play, but its importance in helping the mind and body to be an effective ‘instrument’ in the creative process speaks in a loud voice.

PROJECT 1: SPLIT ART/YOGA/ART SESSION

Subject

How lines and marks became the Silver River of Life and helped our Secret Friend find her way back home.

Objective: To become aware of imagination

- Learning the language of lines and marks and how, put together, they create a picture story.
- Helping children to develop a healthy ‘inner world’ – become aware of chidakasha.
- To become aware of transforming everyday materials into expressions of unlimited creativity.
- To introduce yoga postures as a means of integrating mind and body in the creative process.
- To sensitize the children’s minds to symbolic imagery (surrounding bindu).

Stimulation

1. (optional) If children are full of energy and unable to settle immediately, one or more of the following may be practised:
 - i) Ha breathing
 - ii) Kati chakrasana
 - iii) Hasta utthanasana
 - iv) Tadasana

- v) Jhulana lurkakhansasana
 - vi) Utthita lolasana
 - vii) Shava udarakarshanasana
2. Sit quietly with eyes closed, breathe deeply and imagine that you are going on a special journey.
- We have been asked to help a very special friend to find her way back home to her Silver River of Life. She is waiting a little distance away in her shimmering crescent moon boat. As we breathe deeper and deeper and deeper her boat is drawn closer and closer.
- With your eyes closed can you see her boat coming closer? Can you hear it swishing through rivers of stars, splashing silver dust all over you? In your imagination look at your hands, your arms, your fingers, your legs, shimmering with silver. Can you see her? What does she look like in your mind? What is she wearing, is she shining bright? What does her voice sound like? Is she wearing anything on her head? Does she have anything in her hands, etc.?
- We are going to climb into her crescent boat now. Can you feel it rocking back and forth as you climb on board? She is going to give us special instructions. She had heard the story of Cinderella and how the pumpkin and the mice were transformed into the coach and white horses to take Cinderella to the ball. So, she is hoping we can use some simple lines and marks and transform them into a silver river. She will do the rest.

ART SECTION

Materials

Pencil, #2 (thin) paintbrush, thick bristle brush, black liquid powder paint, sheets of newsprint, white cord, 23 cm squares of cardboard, craft glue (for gluing jewels, etc., on to t-shirts), shells or flat beach stones, silver foil, blue glitter, package of potpourri with scented natural material, e.g. leaves, wood chips (that has lost its scent and can now be reused for craft ideas).

Procedure

1. *Her first instruction is to learn about the language of lines:* Selected free form line drawings with the following characteristics:

- even uniform thickness
- short broken dashes
- wiggling lines
- feathery lines
- strong sweeping lines.

The children are not given these above descriptions of the lines, but are asked to describe the lines either in accordance to form or feeling. For example, did the line look calm, nervous, strong, timid, and what did the line bring to mind? Some of the descriptions given by the children were – worms, a tree blown by the wind, water, flowers, footsteps of a bird jumping.

2. *Her second instruction is to feel and express what lines sound like:*

Listen to several bars of various guitar and piano classical music and the children use alternately the pencil, thin brush, or thick brush with the paint to describe the music with lines alone.

3. *Her third instruction is to listen to how her river began:* A short description is read about the flow of water, starting with the rain drops falling gently on trees and grass, and into the river which is flowing quietly. Then as the rain begins to fall faster and faster, pelting into the river, the flow of the river becomes stronger, flowing over rocks, splashing, picking up stones which bump into each other – the water bubbling and skipping. Then, it is flowing steadily and, just before it reaches the ocean, from the crescent moon high in the sky, drops of sweet liquid fell one by one into the river and it was transformed into the Silver River of Life.

4. *Her fourth instruction is to use lines to describe her river:* As the story is read, again the children used lines to specifically describe the different flows of the water. For example, short dashes for the rain, long curving lines as the river

begins, swirling curling lines with circle rock shapes in the middle.

Some of the lines depicting the river story are selected and redrawn on to the cardboard.

The cord is then cut, outlines the pencil line and glued on to create a relief. Flat river stones to represent the rocks are glued on and some of the cord glued over these rocks to represent the water flowing over them.

YOGA SECTION

Asana and pranayama

While the glued cord was drying, we did yoga still using the theme of the river.

Ideas inspired by reading *Yoga Education for Children* were included in this session:

- Shavasana
- Come closer breath (abdominal breathing): incense holders or items can be put on stomach (like boats), to help children become aware of lungs expanding as the stomach rises with the inhalation – like a wave
- Stardust poses (pawanmuktasana): for becoming aware of the parts of our bodies the stardust fell on
- Rowing Earth Boat (nauka sanchalanasana)
- Earth Boat (naukasana)
- Blossoming Lotus (gatyatmak paschimottanasana)
- River of Life Fish pose (matsyasana)
- River Tree pose (tadasana)
- Swaying River Tree pose (tiryaka tadasana)
- Silver River Bridge pose (setu baddhasana)
- Crescent Moon pose (ardha chandrasana).

Many insects, birds, animals, reptiles have gathered around this Silver River of Life (optional or as variation):

- Bumblebee pose (brahmari asana)
- Butterfly (poorna titali asana)
- Frog (mandukasana)

- Lizard (utthan pristhasana)
- Crocodile (makarasana)
- Crane (bakasana)
- Snake (sarpasana).

Relaxation

Abdominal breathing

Yoga nidra

Including a creative visualization of going by the river, sitting on the rocks, dangling feet in the water, stepping on the pebbles in the river, splashing the water on arms and face, looking at fish, walking in the river, lying on the grassy bank, looking at the sky, listening to all the sounds around – of the birds, the breeze. Seeing the day changing from bright sunshine to the rising of the crescent moon and then seeing the sweet liquid drops falling from the moon into the river as it transforms into the Silver River of Life.



RESUMING ART SECTION

5. *Her fifth instruction is to create the Silver River:* We complete by covering the cardboard, cord and flat stones with a layer of glue. We then place the silver tin foil on top, gently using fingers to press towards the cord over the stones to highlight the relief, and continuing to gently rub foil to the edges of the cardboard.

On the surface of the silver foil we spread glue in some of the spaces of the river between the cord relief, and sprinkle blue glitter, also creating a blue glitter moon at the top above the river.

6. *Her sixth instruction:* We have created the Silver River, but because she wants the moon shining above to know it is hers, she gives us each a piece of her garment to place on the river so once again the drops of sweet liquid will fall from the moon and the river will be transformed into the Silver River of Life.

At this point the strips of blue silk or muslin cloth can be twisted, billowed or curved around the rocks and secured at points with additional flat river stones, glued partly on top of the cloth and partly on the surface of the foil covered cardboard.

7. *Final instructions:* She wants us always to be a part of the Silver River of Life, and that we will always remember her, so she would like us to place around the river things of the earth. Natural leaves and wooden scraps from the potpourri fragrance package are glued as trees around the banks of the river, as a bridge, and a boat on the river.

Observation

The class from which this lesson has been adapted lasted for two hours, but the children aged nine to eleven years maintained their attention and interest throughout. We had intended to start with yoga, but as one of the children had eaten too soon before coming, the plan was changed to start with the art project first. This somehow integrated the yoga very much into the theme of the river, as the children

had been ‘creating’ the river image in a visual and tactile way, and easily continued this idea with the asanas and yoga nidra.

PROJECT 2: ART/YOGA SESSION

Subject

Another View of the World (Part 1)

Objective

To stimulate the right side of the brain (part 1) and introduce, through colour, the concept of ida and pingala (part 2).

Recent research on the right and left hemispheres of the brain has shown that the “right brain processes visual information in the way one needs to see in order to draw . . . the basic assumption is that the nature of (any) task can influence which hemisphere of the brain will be in control and ‘take on’ the job . . . since drawing is largely a right brain function, we must keep the left brain out of it . . . the left brain is dominant and speedy and is very prone to rush in with words and symbols, even taking on jobs which it is not good at, and prefers not to relinquish tasks to the right side of the brain, unless it really dislikes the job – either because the job takes too much time, is too detailed or slow, or because the left brain is simply unable to accomplish the task. That is exactly what we need – tasks that the dominant left brain will turn down, exercises that present the brain with a task which the left hemisphere either can’t or won’t do.” (Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*)

Stimulation

1. To begin preparing the children’s minds to process information presented in a different way from how we are accustomed to seeing the world, and to grasp that familiar images appear different if seen from different angles. Select a variety of images: headlines from newspapers, or photographs from magazines, calendars, etc., and show

them to the children upside down for a few seconds to see how quickly they can guess what the image or words are.

2. Trataka (concentrated gazing) using a card with the word 'JOY' written on it and with a dot in the centre of the 'O'.

ART SECTION

Materials

Drawing boards, drawing paper, drawing pencils, erasers, masking tape, popular cartoon images enlarged, objects found around the house, e.g. kettle, shoe, hat, chair, etc.

Procedure: Exercises that encourage right brain participation

Everything is upside down (adapted from Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*):

1. Each child carefully writes their name in large script, and then turns the written name upside down. Looking at the lines that form the name from this angle, redraw the 'upside down' lines creating a mirror image.
2. Select a simple line illustration or cartoon, cut out and mount on cardboard. Turn upside down and again have children redraw these upside down lines.

The focus should not be on what the actual finished picture actually is, but on the lines as they connect with each other.

Without looking:

3. Select a simple, but interesting object as suggested, e.g. old shoe, hat, chair, etc., and place it in front of children. Tape drawing paper to drawing board with masking tape. The children then place the drawing board on their laps under the table, as the focus in this exercise is not to look at what is being drawn, but to concentrate on the object in front of them.

The children can pretend that they are an ant or an inchworm and they are going to be travelling around the

object, aware of every rise and fall, every sharp side, every curve as if they were actually on the object. Without looking at what they are drawing, let what the eyes are seeing direct the hand as they do a line drawing of the object.

They should not be concerned if the lines cross, overlap or do not connect. The purpose of this exercise is really to 'see' the object they are drawing and this is a task that the left brain will happily let the right brain perform as it requires slow and focused attention, as against the left brain characteristic to speedily look at the image, to come to a conclusion as to the basic simplified shape, and to neglect presenting the minute details.

YOGA SECTION

Selecting postures with the theme of 'another view of the world', being aware of how different the world looks if you are upside down, or bending over sideways, etc. Additionally, a simple introductory practice of *trataka* can be presented, as this helps with the focused observation of the object being drawn.

Asana

- Eye exercises (as our eyes are one of the tools used in drawing): sideways viewing, diagonal viewing, rotational viewing, up and down viewing, near and distant viewing
- *Greeva sanchalana* (neck movements)
- Hand exercises (as our hands and fingers extending from our arms are also one of the tools used for drawing and painting): *mushtika bandhana* (hand clenching), *manibandha naman* (wrist bending), *manibandha chakra* (wrist joint rotation)
- *Kehuni naman* (elbow bending)
- *Skandha chakra* (shoulder socket rotation)
- *Matsyasana* (fish pose)
- *Chakrasana* (wheel pose)
- *Ushtrasana* (camel pose)

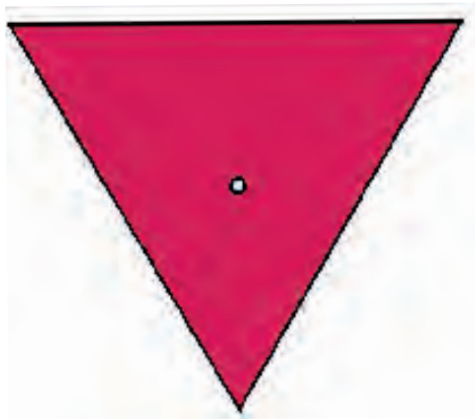
- Parvatasana (mountain pose)
- Pada hastasana (forward bending pose)
- Bakasana (crane pose)
- Brahmari asana (bumblebee pose)
- Tiryaka tadsana (swaying palm tree pose)
- Trikonasana (triangle pose)
- Shavasana (corpse pose)

Relaxation

Abdominal breathing

Trataka

Steady relaxed gazing (using a card with an inverted red triangle with a white dot in the centre).



Yoga nidra

Including a visualization that would help identify and integrate the two hemispheres of the brain. For example, imagining two gardens: one with *blue* flowers on the *right* (representing the right hemisphere of the brain which controls the left side of the body and passive, intuitive activities). The second one with *red* flowers on the *left* (representing the left hemisphere of the brain which controls the right side of the body and more vital, physical activity).



Then imagine walking with a basket in the garden on the *right* among the *blue* flowers, picking some of these flowers, taking them and placing them in the garden on the *left*, among the *red* flowers. Then do the opposite: picking the *red* flowers and taking them over to the *blue* flowers, so that gradually, on both sides, there is an even amount of *blue* and *red* flowers.

To end the class the children may stand or sit in a circle and hold hands, making a mandala, and chant *Om*.

PROJECT 3: GROUP ART/YOGA/ART SESSION

Subject

‘Hanging saris out to dry’. Central theme: what is the national dress of your country?

For the purpose of this lesson, saris will be the dress chosen, but the lesson can centre around other dress, e.g. Japanese kimono, Scottish tartan kilts, Jamaican bandana, African wrap.

Objectives

- Colour perspective
- Appreciation of patterns
- Appreciation of the national dress of an individual's country and other countries
- Developing photographic memory
- Becoming aware of seeing in chidakasha.

Stimulation

1. Show children pictures/actual saris and, after looking at each one intently for a few minutes, have them close their eyes and imagine they are standing in front of a large canvas, with paint and brush, and they are mixing the colour of the sari that they just looked at and painting the entire canvas with this colour.
2. Then, have them open their eyes and look to see if they remembered what they had observed. This exercise may be repeated more than once with the same sari until the child feels as though he had taken a photograph with his mind. Other saris may also be shown.
3. Alternately, cut squares of coloured tissue which have the basic colour of the saris shown and staple to cartridge paper. Give to the children and ask them to use a pencil to draw on the different coloured tissue any patterns they remembered on that particular colour sari.
4. Show reproductions of paintings that illustrate colour perspective – creating a foreground and background (large bright images in front, lighter smaller images in the background).
5. Show pictures of various dress worn in different countries.

ART SESSION

Materials

Coloured tissue paper (bright colours and light colours), gold and silver fine point markers, other colour markers, sequins,

rhinestones, white cartridge paper, white cord, glue stick, glue gun (*not* water based glue as the tissue paper will ripple and colours will run; for this reason, paint cannot be used on the tissue paper), gold ric rac, dimensional fabric and craft fabric paint in plastic containers with applicator tips, crayons, display board, powder paint and brushes to paint background of display board.

Procedure

1. Show children actual saris, allowing them to feel the material, observing the border/repetitive/decorative patterns (if no actual saris available, then use pictures).
2. Using crayons, coloured markers, gold and silver markers and sequins, each child creates an original pattern inspired by patterns seen, on a bright large strip of tissue and a smaller, lighter strip of tissue, cut as miniature saris.
3. Three-dimensional effects may be created using dimensional fabric and craft paint, creating raised lines/squiggles or outlining some of the patterns, and as blobs to adhere sequins and costume rhinestones.
4. Show children images of actual mountain scenery in India – Himalayas, etc. On one large display board, covered with cartridge paper, which may be stapled to board, children may create as close as possible an authentic India mountain landscape of mountains, sky and grass, using markers or powder paint.
5. To create the lines to hang the washing on, cut two lengths of white cord, laying the first just below the middle of the display board. Using glue gun, glue cord securely at both ends of the covered board. (Suggestion: Powder paint can be mixed with powder detergent to increase the volume of paint when painting large areas such as this display board.)
6. The second line, being in the background, is not as long and does not stretch from one side of the display board to the other. We, therefore, have to create two wooden poles to hang this second line on. These may be painted about

8 cms in from either side of the display board, or actual pieces of wood may be glued at this same distance and above and behind the first washing line.

7. Attach or glue the second washing line between and around these two poles.

While the paint, glue, etc., is drying, the yoga class may be conducted. This also gives the children a chance to step back from their work, taking a relaxing, rejuvenating break; a habit which formed early can also be beneficial later on in life.

YOGA SECTION

Postures centred around the theme of washing clothes and hanging them to dry; a universal theme in all parts of the world.

Asanas

- Surya namaskara (salute to the sun), as in all parts of the world this is a natural means of drying clothes
- Knee poses, as in many parts of the world people have to squat by rivers to wash their clothes
- Namaskarasana (salutation pose)
- Vayu nishkasana (wind releasing pose)
- Utthanasana (squat and rise pose)
- Utthita lolasana (Mr Breeze Please Blow pose), as breeze is also a natural means of drying clothes
- Tiriyaka tadasana (swaying palm tree pose/breeze blowing tree pose)
- Tadasana (laundry pose)
- Shavasana (corpse pose)

Relaxation

Abdominal Breathing

Trataka

Fixed gazing at dark colour shapes and seeing counter image on card or paper below or inside.



Yoga Nidra

With visualization of hanging saris to dry on a mountain, with the sun shining, with the breeze blowing which makes it a bit challenging to hang as they billow around you, the physical movements of bending down, then stretching up to hang the saris, the view from the mountain and the sounds.

Variation: the children could become the saris being washed, wrung out, hung out to dry, blowing in the wind, light and airy, becoming dry and explore these feelings.

RESUME ART PROJECT

8. Overlap the tissue saris over the cord. The large, brightly coloured miniature saris should be hung on the front wash line and the lighter, smaller ones on the line behind. Small brightly coloured clothes pins could be attached to some to create an authentic effect. As this is a group project, the children combine all their saris to hang on the line to dry

To end class, the children may sit in a circle holding hands making a Mandala, chanting *Om*.

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Yoga Magic Carpet Rides™

Rishi Arundhati Saraswati

Illustrations by Keisha Quinn (aged 12 years)

Everything we learn in schools and elsewhere should bring us nearer to the point of world unity, where all the differences dissolve and merge into unity.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

I think the more we come to know about each other's differences, the more likely we are to bring about a greater understanding between people. Young children's bodies and minds are forming and absorbing information easily, so it is easy to help them adopt an open-minded attitude towards other cultures and other societies and at the same time do their bodies a great service by doing the postures. This chapter contains suggestions for exploring information about the world with the use of yoga asanas and pranayama. These are just for fun and to give a theme to a session.

The places visited here were chosen arbitrarily. A bit of geographical and/or historical information is available for the reader and practitioner as well. Familiarity makes it easier to retell the ride. The whole ride mentally makes a great way to end the session during relaxed alertness – yoga nidra.

There are certain things that you have to remember when giving a session. These carpet rides originated in Ancaster,

Ontario, Canada, so what we see geographically between us and where we are going is not what I would see were I to travel to these same places from other places, e.g. from India or Texas, etc.

These are sessions which can not only make geography classes or geography club fun but can also challenge the teacher to be up on their own yoga knowledge. Of course, they are loads of fun and the yoga classes and the yoga instructors should be geographically correct.

Mantra has to do with sound vibrations and their effect on the cells, nerves, emotions and mind. Mantra has been introduced in every ride. Usually, it is only the sounds 'AUM' or 'OM' and here is how the chanting is done:

- Take a deep breath in through the nostrils, open the mouth wide and exhale with sound. 'AH' is produced.
- Continue the sound while closing the lips half way and 'U' is produced.
- Bring lips back together and 'M' is produced as the sound is continued.

All very natural, no mystery and no religious connotations.

Research using EEG showed readings in the 'b-wave' range at the beginning when sounding the 'AU' sound, but when the lips were brought together and the sound continued, the EEG readings tended toward 'a-wave' range. So, the resulting brain wave activity will depend on how the mantra is sounded. To become more alert sound the 'AU' long and the 'M' short. To introvert and relax, sleep or meditate, one should sound the 'AU' short and the 'M' long. For our purpose, we want to relax the children but keep their attention focused, what we call 'relaxed alertness', so we want to produce equal length of sound. 'AA UU MM' or 'OOO MMM' when the 'AU' are run together into 'O' sound.

In one of the rides we have also incorporated mantra with all the asanas. It all started with the helicopter pose and the obvious mantra to chant, the manipura chakra bija mantra: *ram*. We all have a vital body, a body of energy, which has seven dominant reservoirs. Energy is kinetic and is producing

a sound that corresponds to its rate of vibration. Each of the seven energy reservoirs vibrates at a slightly different rate so produce a slightly different sound. These are called seed sounds, or *bija mantras*. Children like sounds and readily will reproduce nonsense words that they have themselves come up with. So mantra sounds, like the bijas, can be brought into the practice, if not from the beginning, then later to make the same practice a bit different.

It is important that the set of exercises we teach the children should be balanced in completeness of flexion in the spinal column, inversion and balance. This is especially true when we start to choose the exercises to fit the story line or world event, or a lesson in geography or history.

Very important to remember is that, when we teach yoga to anyone, whether children or adults, one of the primary aims of the *asanas* (postures) is to maintain healthy spinal flexibility and a balanced level of energy. Therefore, as teachers, it is important that when we design a set of practices for our students that we have forward, backward and lateral bending of the spinal column included in the set to maintain its flexibility. Lateral movements include both twisting and side to side movements as in the triangle pose variations.

As children we have to learn to balance in order to walk, and we lose this facility as seniors and require aids such as canes, walkers, etc.; therefore, it is important that balancing exercises be an integral part of the yoga postures taught to children or adults. Also, balancing exercises aid in developing concentration, another reason balancing exercises are an important aspect in practices for yoga at school.

Standing balancing exercises have been shown to help children with bed-wetting problems and they can be done easily in the rows between desks in a classroom setting. It is interesting that, at around the same age we learn to balance ourselves and walk, we attain bladder control, and as seniors these are two common problems. Yoga has always maintained that balance is one thing we should keep in top form through regular daily practice.

When children are having fun they are more relaxed and natural and can learn more easily. However, while having fun and making the asana practice fit into the characters of a story the teacher should keep these important principles in mind. For the asana session to be completely balanced it should contain:

1. Forward flexion of the spinal column
2. Backward flexion of the spinal column
3. Lateral flexion of the spinal column
4. Relaxed sitting posture
5. Balancing postures
6. Inverted postures
7. Relaxation posture.

In the Yoga Magic Carpet Ride to Ancient Egypt, we have taken some historical and geographical data about ancient Egypt, with some recent population data for comparison. On the ride we are 'rowing the barge' (nauka sanchalanasana), from the delta of the Nile River, at the Mediterranean Sea, to the present day capital, Cairo. This is forward bending and stretching legs, etc., with all the benefits of hairpin pose (paschimottanasana) done as a dynamic pose.

Here in Cairo, we visit the Egyptian Museum where we see the mummies, a relaxation pose (shavasana). We take a camel (ushtrasana), a backward bending pose, out of Cairo to Gizathe to see the pyramids (parvatasana), a forward bending pose with inversion, where we see the sphinx, a backward arching pose, and while there see the hieroglyphs on the walls of the pyramids. Hieroglyph pose is a standing, twisting, balance exercise.

We travel further down the Nile River, past the Old Kingdom capital of Memphis, to Karnack, the capital of the New Kingdom, where we see the burial treasures of the boy pharaoh, Tutankhamen. There we see the pharaoh (ardha matsyendrasana), looking out on his kingdom. This has all the benefits of the seated half-twist pose. We also see Queen Cleopatra, a standing balance exercise, who killed herself with an asp (sarpasana or bhujangasana), a backward bending pose.

Then we see a few mummies again before we start back to the sea and are carried toward the delta in our barge (naukasana), a forward bending balance.

In all, there are ten different asanas: three forward and three backward bending postures, two standing, twisting balance, one seated twisting and the relaxation pose.

These are a few possible combinations of asanas that can be used in Yoga Magic Carpet Ride to Ancient Egypt, i.e. the Nile River along with its crocodiles, fish, ibis, etc., gives one some variety and substitutions for using the material again and again. Also the teacher should use the mummy pose many times during the session. There are a lot of mummies in Egypt, even the cats were mummified!

Visual aids

When going for a Yoga Magic Carpet Ride, it is helpful to have pictures of the different sites, animals, landscapes and, if possible, a map of the country that you are planning to visit. Visual aids help to put the information into the memory and are an aid in the learning process.

The following material has three rides, each with two parts. Part 1 contains the geographical and/or historical information and part 2, The Ride. The postures used for the rides are all well described in the chapter on asana and pranayama.

1. MAGIC CARPET RIDE TO ANCIENT EGYPT

1.1: Geographical and historical information

Egypt is a country in eastern Africa and is considered by many to be the very centre of present day civilization. Although today it is but a shadow of its former self, people from all over the world are attracted to the many monuments and to its ancient power and greatness.

The Nile River is the largest river on the African continent, being 3,405 miles long. It emerges from Lake Victoria as the Victoria Nile and then from Lake Albert as the Albert Nile,

continuing to Sudan as the Bahr el Jebel as far as Lake No and as the White Nile to Khartoum. There it is joined by the Blue Nile from western Ethiopia, continuing as the Nile proper to its delta on the Mediterranean Sea. At this triangular delta, built of rich black silt at the river's mouth, cultivation of wheat, barley and flax began to replace nomadic herding around about 5000 BC. This delta breadbasket became Egypt's power centre.

The Nile is the real lifeblood of a country with a total area of 386,660 square miles (over one million square kilometres), but only 12,500 square miles (about 32,000 square kilometres) are arable. The present day Egyptians are now forty million strong, and may double in number in a few years. The area is almost equal to France and Spain combined, but ninety-six percent of the people live squeezed onto only four percent of the land – the long green strands that flank the Nile.

Cairo, Africa's most populous city, blends East and West, ancient and modern. Romans occupied the site two thousand years ago. In 641 AD, Arabs founded El Fustat nearby and in 969 AD, a new walled city, El Qahira (the Victorious), became capital of the Fatimid empire. By the early 1300s, Cairo outshone every city in Europe and the Middle East. Many of its architectural gems date from the Mamluk era (1257–1517).

The oldest ship known to date was found almost perfectly preserved in a sealed tomb beside Khufu's Pyramid in Giza. Its 1,224 cedar timber components, placed there forty-six centuries ago, took many hours of effort to be put together into this 142 foot (43 metre) long ship. It might have been Khufu's funeral barge that was buried beside him for his use in the hereafter by his son, Djedefre, sometime around 2550 BC.

Giza is really like a large cemetery which lies just on the outskirts of modern day Cairo. Some four thousand members of the elite were buried at this cemetery on the Giza plateau between 2600–2000 BC.

The Sphinx and the pyramid tombs of Giza are some of the most well known ancient structures. They were erected by the Dynasty IV kings, who worshipped the sun god, Re. The great pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) was built in about 2550 BC. It is 755 feet square (seventy square metres) and 481 feet (146 metres) tall and is the world's largest stone edifice. Khufu's funerary complex includes four small subsidiary pyramids, five pits for his royal boats, a mortuary temple and a valley temple, identified in 1990. Only Khafre's (Chephren's) pyramid retains part of the original casing of gleaming white limestone. The third and smallest pyramid was built by Menkaure, a grandson to Khufu.

The earliest pyramid, by Pharaoh Djoser, was built in about 2630 BC. This step pyramid rises out of the sand about ten miles (sixteen kilometres) south of Giza. To construct such monuments required mastery of art, architecture and social organization that few cultures would ever rival.

The Sphinx, carved from limestone bedrock to stand guard before the Giza pyramids is a sixty-six foot (twenty metre) high colossus. It was created in about 2500 BC for Pharaoh Khafre, who raised the second Giza pyramid. He never finished the statue, and later Giza was largely abandoned.

About 1,400 BC, Thutmose IV, son of Pharaoh Amenhotep II, was stopped on a hunting party by the enormous head rising out of the sand. While he napped under its chin, the sphinx appeared in a dream, speaking as both the sun god and the god of kingship, Hor-em-akhet. The sphinx prophesized that Thutmose would be made king and free the god from the sand.

Thutmose uncovered the statue, encased its weathered body with limestone blocks, and painted it blue, yellow and red. He erected a statue in front of the sphinx's chest, possibly of his father, symbolizing the king's emergence from and protection by Hor-em-akhet.

When Thutmose became pharaoh, he inscribed his dream on a tall granite stele which is the centrepiece of an

open-air shrine below the statue. One hundred years later, Ramses II placed two of his own stelae on the side walls of the shrine and may have added his name to the statue of Amenhotep II.

Early in the 15th century, an Arab historian reported the disfigured face of the Sphinx. Computer reconstructions of the Sphinx, using the face of other sphinxes and pharaohs, came alive when the face of Khafre, taken from a life-size diorite statue, was used.

The population of the Old Kingdom of Ancient Egypt was about one to one and a half million; however, only about one percent was literate. They believed that writing had been invented by the god Thoth who is usually pictured as a scribe with an ibis head. Hieroglyphic is a system of writing in which figures or objects are used to represent words or sounds.

Hieroglyphic writing has been traced back to about 3200 BC, shortly after a written language arose in Mesopotamia. Many student scribes learned cursive script, used for letters, administrative documents, and literary pieces; hieroglyphs required further training. It was during the expedition to Egypt by Napoleon in 1799, near the town of Rosetta, Egypt, that the Rosetta Stone was discovered. This fragment of basalt tablet, inscribed with a decree of Ptolemy V of 196 BC, written in Egyptian hieroglyphic, Greek and Demotic, was to be the key to decipherment of hieroglyphic.

From Cairo, southward along the Nile, is Memphis, Egypt's capital during the Old Kingdom, which remained powerful until the rise of Cairo in the first millennium AD. Memphis is said to have been founded by Aha, first pharaoh of Dynasty I, about 3000 BC. Further southward along the Nile is the ancient, awe inspiring city of Thebes, Egypt's New Kingdom capital.

Known today as Luxor, its state temples stood on the east bank of the river; the necropolis, with its funerary temples and rock-cut tombs, west of the river. The Temple of Luxor presides over the busiest tourist centre in southern Egypt.

A grand avenue lined with sphinxes once linked the temple – built by Amenhotep III (1391–1353 BC) and enlarged by Tutankhamen, Ramses II and Alexander the Great – to Karnack, where the Great Temple of Amun, patron god of Thebes, dominates a 250 acre (100 hectare) complex of temples, chapels, colossi and obelisks.

Shortly after 1500 BC, concealed tombs cut in rock replaced pyramid burial chambers. Almost all the New Kingdom pharaohs were buried in the Valley of the Kings, chosen perhaps because the outcrop above resembled a pyramid. One of the greatest treasures ever found in Egypt was the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen which yielded nearly five thousand items, many in solid gold with semi-precious jewels. The tomb of this boy pharaoh, who reigned about 1400 BC, was discovered by Howard Carter as late as 1922. Discoveries here continue even to today.

Cleopatra VI or VII, who lived between 69–30 BC, was Queen of Egypt and was married to Ptolemy XII, her brother. When Egypt had been conquered by the Romans, it is said that rather than be taken by Julius Caesar to Rome, she clutched a small asp, a deadly viper, to her chest and its bite killed her.

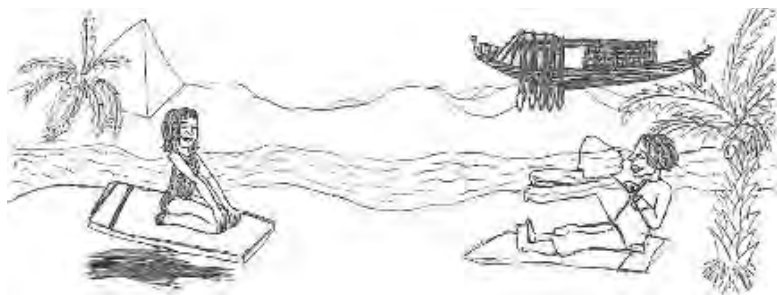
1.2: The Ride to Ancient Egypt

Hi everyone, 'namaste'. Let's take a Yoga Magic Carpet Ride to Ancient Egypt. Imagine your towel, mat, blanket or sleeping bag is your magic carpet.

So seat yourself in vajrasana, the diamond pose. Then we will all chant the magic word three times to get these carpets off the ground. Take a deep breath in and chant loudly together, AAUUMM AAUUMM AAUUMM.

We are flying over the Atlantic, up the Mediterranean Sea, to the delta of the Nile River. We will come down at the delta and row our barge down to Cairo.

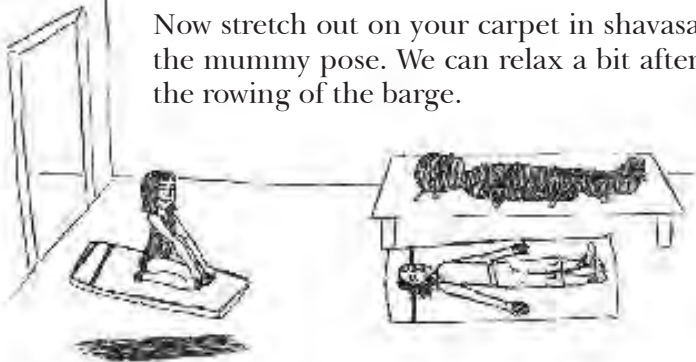
So sit with your legs outstretched in front of you and we will row the barge up the Nile River to Cairo.



Let's do nauka sanchalanasana, rowing the barge.
See the barge? Let's get rowing!

After rowing the barge down to Cairo we will stop off at the museum and visit the mummies.

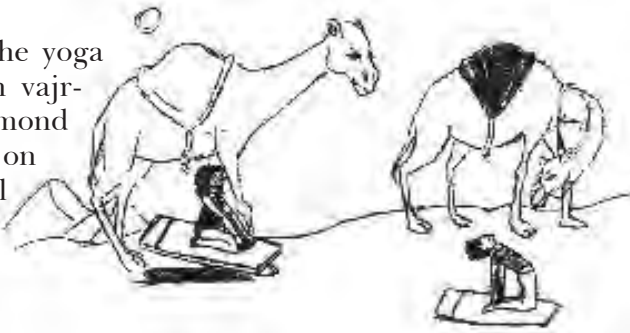
Now stretch out on your carpet in shavasana, the mummy pose. We can relax a bit after all the rowing of the barge.



After resting a few minutes with the mummies we will get on a camel to take a trip out into the desert. We are going to Giza.

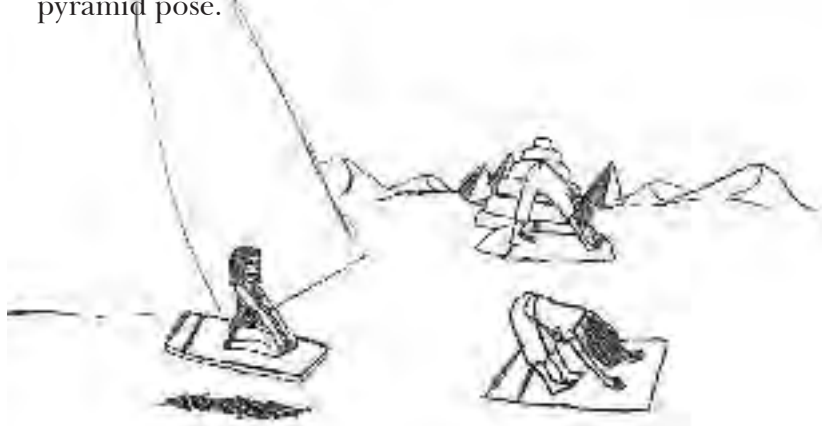
What is a trip to Egypt without a camel ride and seeing the pyramids?

So sit up the yoga way and sit in vajrasana, the diamond pose. And get on your camel. Feel as he rises into position.



Giza is really a cemetery where many of the early pharaohs are buried. There are three major pyramids here which date from around 2000 BC. Now that's old! Those pyramids are quite impressive.

From the diamond pose, move into parvatasana, the pyramid pose.



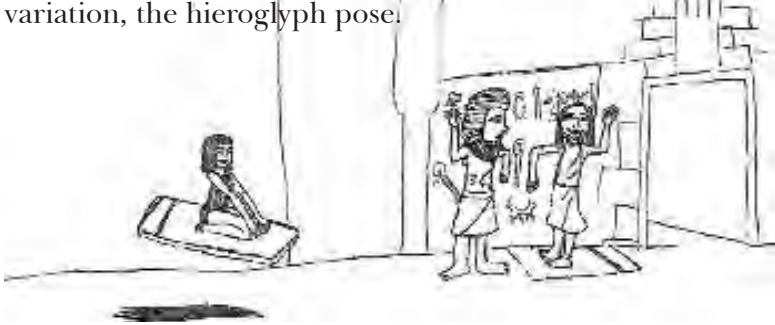
Oh wow! Take a look at that Sphinx. He looks like a lion with a man's head which is supposed to resemble the pharaoh that built the second major pyramid.

From vajrasana, the diamond pose, let us try to look like the Sphinx by doing simhasana, the lion's pose.



Get a good look at the stela. You can read the history of ancient Egypt if you can read hieroglyphics. Be one of the hieroglyphs.

So stand up straight and do dandayman pranamasana variation, the hieroglyph pose.



Okay, time to get back on the barge and row on down the Nile River to Karnack. Here we will see the burial place of the boy pharaoh, Tutankhamen.

Let's row the barge once again. Do rowing the barge, nauka sanchalanasana.



The pharaoh is sitting in audience. Let's be a pharaoh and sit in audience.

Sit in the base pose and take ardha matsyendrasana variation 1, pharaoh in audience pose.

Now he is surveying his kingdom as he twists from side to side. Survey the kingdom like the pharaoh doing ardha matsyendrasana variation 2.



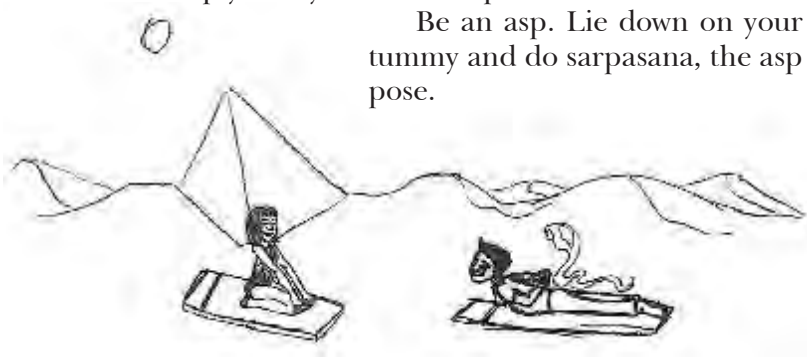
A trip to Ancient Egypt would not be complete without a visit to see Cleopatra.

So let's all stand tall in dandayman pranamasana variation, the Cleopatra pose.



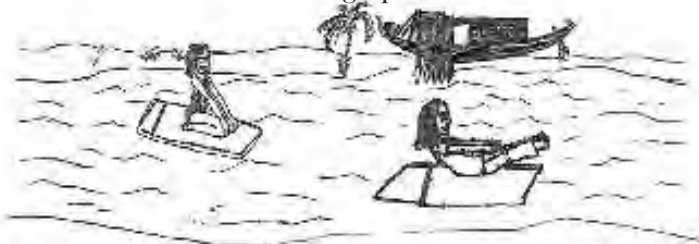
Cleopatra died from the bite of the deadly asp, a type of cobra. So keep your eyes on that asp.

Be an asp. Lie down on your tummy and do sarapasana, the asp pose.



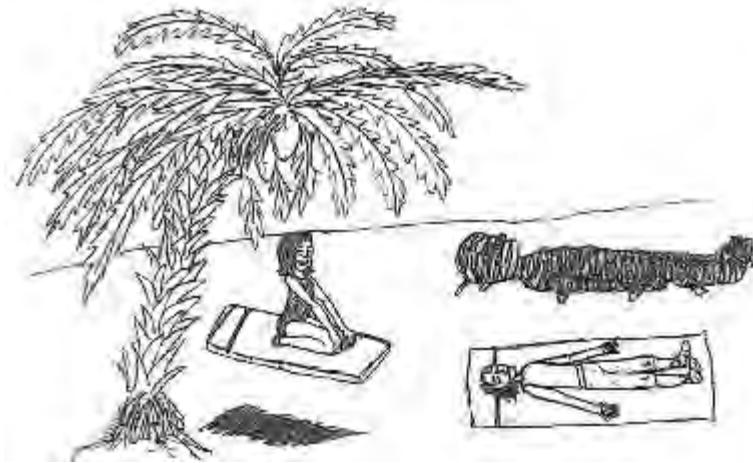
Now we can start back to the delta for our return trip home. Since we are following the flow of the river we can just float in the barge down the Nile.

So do naukasana, the barge pose.



While floating back to the delta we will see lots of mummies. They even have mummies of cats in Egypt. The cat was considered sacred so they were often mummified.

So lie down once again in shavasana, the mummy pose, and have a good rest before we start the trip home.



Now that we are back at the delta, let's roll out the magic carpet and head home.

Sit in vajrasana, the diamond pose, and we need to say the magic word AUM again three times to get the carpet moving. This time, whisper it loudly three times: AAUUMM AAUUMM AAUUMM.

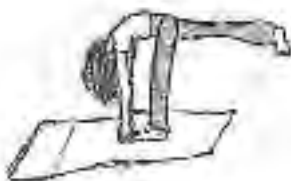


We are back in the yoga classroom, you have had a very interesting journey back in time to learn about the ancient Egyptians.

Now relax yourself and stretch your legs.



Here are some more things you might see
on a trip to Ancient Egypt.



One might see an ibis.
So, do bakasana, the
ibis pose.

Or one might see a crocodile.
So, do makarasana, the crocodile pose.



One would also expect to see fish
in the Nile River.
Do matsyasana, the fish pose.



There were many date
palms in Ancient Egypt
also.
Do eka pada pranam-
asana, the date palm
tree pose.

And of course, don't
forget the sacred cats!

2. MAGIC CARPET RIDE TO THE ARCTIC AND ANTARCTIC

2.1: Geographical Information

The North and South Poles are the ends of the earth's axis of rotation, referred to as the magnetic poles. Both these regions have similarities in that they are year-round mostly ice bound, cold, remote and harsh environments. However, they differ in that the North Pole is located in the Arctic Ocean, whereas the South Pole is located on the continent of Antarctica. Antarctica is the only continent within the Antarctic Circle and there are no native people of Antarctica, whereas there are many different continents that have a presence within the Arctic Circle. Asia, North America and Europe all have land that stretches as far north as the Arctic Circle, such as Russia, USA, Canada, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Native inhabitants from twelve different nations can be found living within the Arctic Circle.

The Arctic and Antarctic Circles are parallels of latitude at 66° 33' north and south of the equator, which marks the limit of the North and South Frigid Zones. The South Pole is substantially colder than its northern counterpart, so the winds are stronger in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Arctic: Today many of these rugged frigid places are being visited by tourists, as well as being tested for possible mineral, oil and other exploitable goods. But the native peoples that have lived within the Arctic Circle for generations are still living the life that they choose to live for as long as it will still be possible. The discovery of gas, oil, minerals and gold brings about a difference within their environment. This is true also for those native people of the Arctic, e.g. some of the Alaskans have settled in apartments and work for a good wage so they are becoming accustomed to an easier lifestyle even within their harsh environment. The original nationalities are the North Alaskan Eskimos, Aleut, Kutchin, Central Canadian, Baffin Island, Polar, West Greenland, Lapp, Nenets, Evenk, Yakut and Chukchi. Each

ethnic group has their own dress and lifestyle, either nomadic or settled, according to their own environmental needs.

The Antarctic: The continent of Antarctica was formed over 150 million years ago when Gondwana, a super-continent broke apart and the different elements of that continent, including Antarctica, Australia, and India, drifted over the millions of years to their present positions. Antarctica, which is larger than Europe or Australia, was not actually discovered until the early 19th Century. It contains more than two-thirds of the world's fresh water in the form of ice, yet some areas receive less than two inches (five centimetres) of precipitation a year.

At the Antarctic Convergence, where northern currents meet polar waters, the water is fertile with nutrients roiled up from the depths, which support a plankton community which in turn supports a large variety of birds, dolphins, subantarctic fur seals, whales, emperor penguins and other creatures. The harsh climate means there are few terrestrial animals. Mites, lice, midges and springtails are the largest land animals. The springtails, a millimetre long arthropod, are the largest land animal that over winters on Ross Island. They produce anti-freeze which increases in winter and reduces in summer which makes this possible.

Much of the Antarctic Peninsula has a geologic makeup favourable for deposits of copper, lead, zinc, gold, silver and other minerals. Antarctica is the highest, coldest and the most desolate place on the globe. The Transantarctic Mountains contain low grade coal in what may be the world's largest formation.

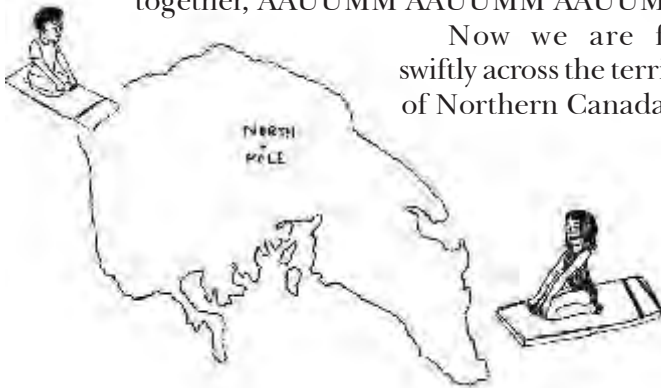
The basic provisions of the Antarctic Treaty, which is a legal framework for free access to the continent, states that Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only; scientific personnel and information are to be exchanged freely, each party has the right to inspect other's installations and no new territorial claims are to be asserted.

2.2a: The Ride to the Arctic

Today we are going to take a Yoga Magic Carpet Ride to the Arctic, the North Pole. So your mats, sleeping bags, or carpets are your magic carpets.

So seat yourself in vajrasana, the diamond pose. Then we will all chant the magic word three times to get these carpets off the ground. Take a deep breath in and chant loudly together, AAUUMM AAUUMM AAUUMM.

Now we are flying swiftly across the territories of Northern Canada.



We are heading towards Ellesmere Island and from there we will continue our trek to the North Pole. Take another deep breath in and a deep breath out and feel how it relaxes you already.

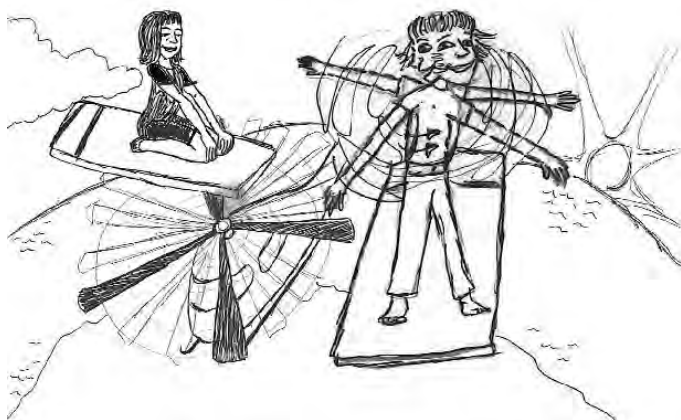
We are taking the Magic Carpet as far as Alert, Ellesmere Island. From there we will set out for the North Pole.

Since we are right above our target city, let's slowly come to rest on the ground. Now stretch your legs out in front and then stand up, because we are going to go to the North Pole in a helicopter.

So we have to stand in the pose with the arms hanging loosely by our sides. Do kati chakrasana variation, helicopter pose.

With sound: *raam* chanting variation.

First we have to start the motor, so we start *raam-raam-raam-raam*. And as the motor starts to turn over, the rotors start to rise and become extended. As the motor starts to increase its speed to *raam-raam-raam-raam*, the rotors start



to turn, slowly at first and gradually gaining speed until we reach the North Pole. When we see the North Pole beneath us, then we slow the motor down as we land, lower the rotors, park the helicopter and turn off the motor. (Can be done without sound.)

The first thing we need to do now that we have landed here is to plant the flag.



Do trikonasana, plant the flag pose.

With sound – windy day variation: singing *lam* to national anthem tunes.

Once the flags are planted we get a chance to look about, but we all suddenly go very quiet and start to listen. Why?

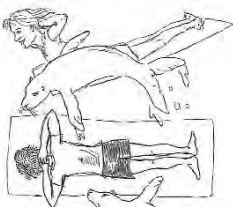
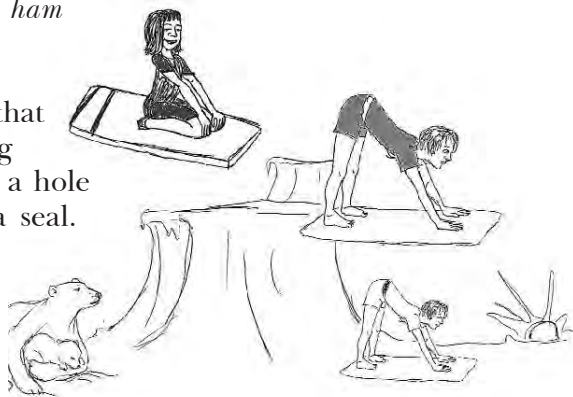
Because we suddenly realize we hear a ‘hamming’ sound: *ham, ham, ham, ham, ham*, so we immediately think of Pooh Bear. We hear the ‘hamming’ and so we keep looking for Pooh, but in the distance we see a beautiful white polar bear walking with her cub. We’ll stay far away from them and have another look around.

Do parvatasana variation, the polar bear pose.

With sound: *ham*
chanting.

Hey! What is that we see now poking its nose through a hole in the ice? It’s a seal. Well, it seems very friendly because it has come up onto the frozen ice and is searching for food. Hear him

yam, yam, yam, yam, yam, yam. Maybe he is looking to see if you have a nice, yummy fish for him.



Do sarpasana variation, seal pose.
With sound: *yam*
chanting.

Oh, look! Here comes a bright red light. Guess what! It’s Rudolph. We see his bright nose and we can hear him humming, *ham sa, ham sa, ham sa,*

ham sa. So now we understand how he is able to fly in the sky, he is humming the mantra of the swan, which is a beautiful sight to see in flight.



Do dwikonasana variation, reindeer pose.
With sound: singing *ham sa*.

Listen! Are those sleigh bells that I hear? Sure enough, it is Santa in his sleigh. Hey, this is a very modern Santa, he has a motorized sleigh, the reindeers are only for the lift.

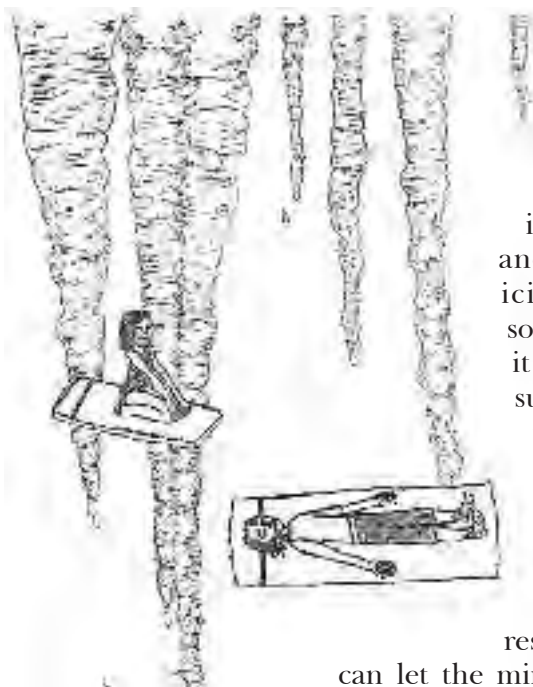
Do saral dhanurasana, sleigh pose.

With sound: *vam* chanting.

We hear Santa chuckling as he revs his sleigh, *vam, vam, vam, vam, vam*.

After showing off his new motorized sleigh, Santa leaves to get back to work and we explore the place a bit more.



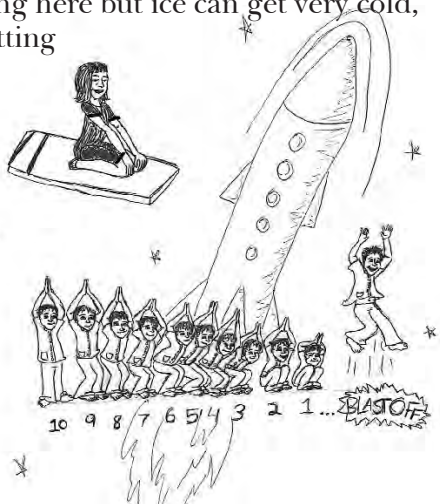


As we know, the North Pole is located out in the Arctic Ocean, so we are on some solid ice. We feel heavy and solid just like an icicle. The icicle is solid and straight, but it melts easily in the sunshine and relaxes us again, making us feel refreshed and energized.

Do shavasana icicle pose.

With sound: While resting in this pose we can let the mind become aware of the natural breath sound which is *So Ham*. The breath whispers *So*, as it flows in and *Ham*, when it flows out. So while allowing the icicle to slowly melt, we hear the sound of the natural breath, *so ham, so ham, so ham*.

Okay, it is very interesting here but ice can get very cold, so we need to think about getting to Ellesmere Island and making our way back home from there with our trusty old Yoga Magic Carpet. So we will go back to Ellesmere Island by rocket. When we blast off we will all shout *Hari Om* loudly, as we spring upwards from the squat to the extended legs with arms outspread in the air.



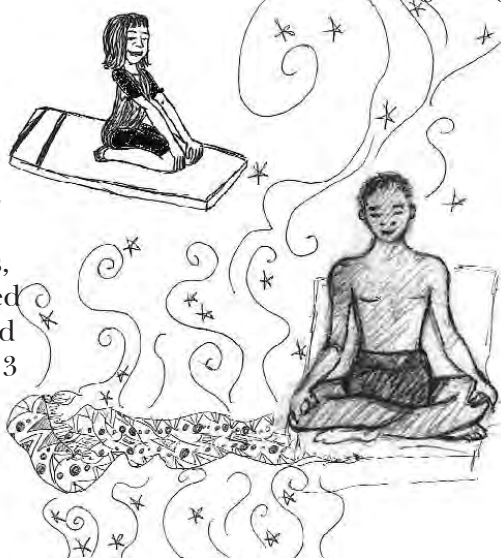
Do utthanasana variation, rocket pose, with backward counting from 10: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, *Hari Om*.

When we come back down to the ground after the rocket ride back to Alert, Ellesmere Island, we unroll our Yoga Magic Carpet and head back home, so we can get warmed up after all that ice.

Do sukhasana, easy seated pose.

Close your eyes, take a deep relaxed breath in and sound the magic word 3 times:

AAUUMM
AAUUMM
AAUUMM.



The carpet is vibrating again and the ground is moving quickly, across the Canadian North. Wow, What a ride! It is slowing down now. Can you feel it?



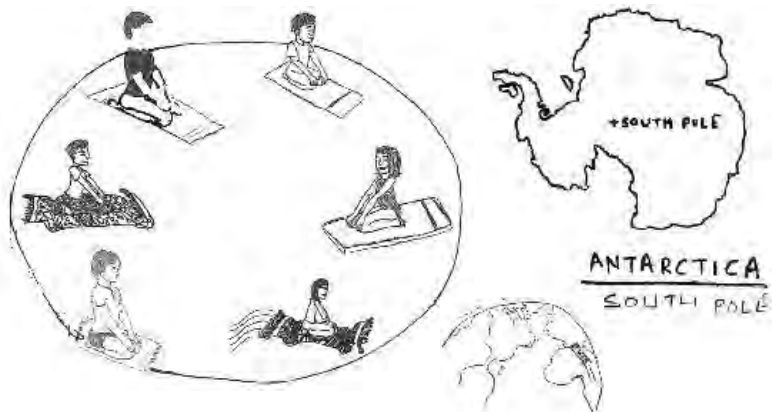
Ah . . . It has stopped. Open your eyes. You are back in the yoga room. Where do we go on our next ride?

2.2b: The Ride to Antarctica

Now we are going to take a Yoga Magic Carpet Ride to the Antarctic, the South Pole. Your mats, sleeping bags, or carpets are your magic carpets.

Do vajrasana, diamond pose

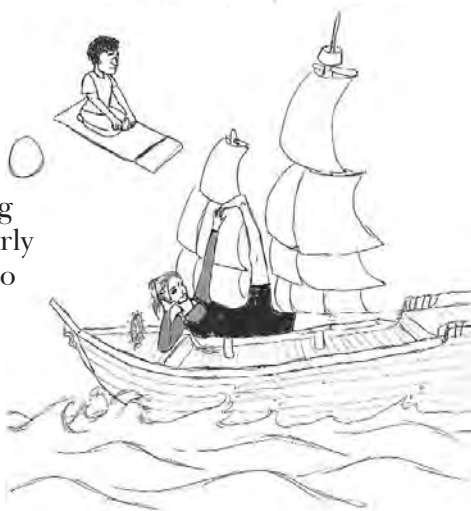
Then we will all chant the magic word three times to get these carpets off the ground. Take a deep breath in and chant loudly together: AAUUMM AAUUMM AAUUMM



We are flying swiftly across Lake Eire, over the United States, over Mexico and still heading south. We are heading towards the most southerly tip of South America, to Isla Navarino, where we will embark on our trek to the South Pole.

We will sail to Antarctica by crossing the Weddell Sea.

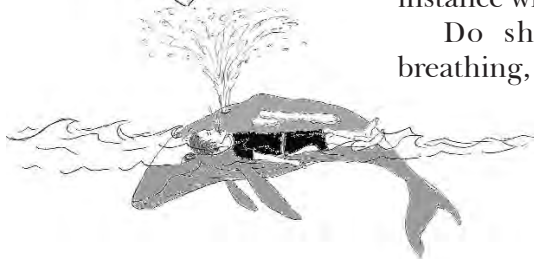
Do meru arkarshanasana, the ship pose.





On the Weddell Sea, as we are sailing to Antarctica, we see many, many different sea creatures, for instance whales.

Do shavasana with ujjayi breathing, whale pose.



Closer to the continent we also see many subantarctic fur seals.

Do sarpasana variation, subantarctic fur seal pose.



As we approach the continent, we see many emperor penguins and other types of penguins as well.

Do dandayman pranammasana variation, emperor penguin pose.

We will get our sleds ready for our trip to a very remote part of the continent, where we will make our camp.

Do saral dhanurasana, sled pose.



But first we will have to cross the transantarctic mountains.



Do parvatasana, transantarctic mountain pose.

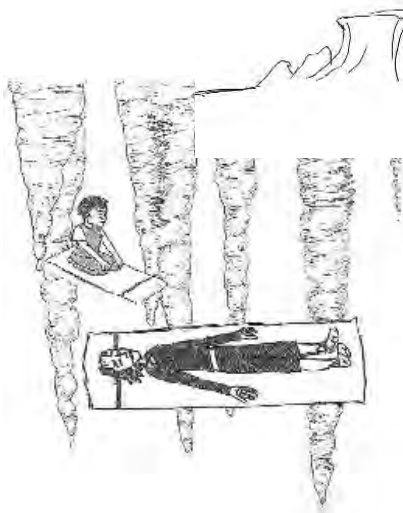
When we arrive at the South Pole, we will plant the flag.

Do trikonasana variation, planting the flag pose.



With all this ice around, we would soon be frozen stiff as icicles if we weren't properly dressed.

Do shavasana, icicle pose. After planting the flag



and a short rest, we head back over the transantarctic mountains for our trip back to South America. We will go back to Chile by submarine.

Do manibandha and goolf chakra, submarine pose variation.



When we come aground in Chile, we will unroll our Yoga Magic Carpets and head back home.

Do vajrasana, diamond pose.

Take a slow, deep breath in and sound the magic word three times in a loud whisper: AAUUMM AAUUMM AAUUMM.



The Carpet is vibrating again and the ground is moving pretty quickly across the continent of South America, over Central America and the United States.

It is slowing down now. It has stopped. Open your eyes. You are back in the yoga room.

22

Pratyahara and Dharana: Relaxation and Concentration

Rishi Arundhati Saraswati

PRATYAHARA

Relaxation is an important technique to learn, not only for those who wish to develop methods for meditation, but as a necessity for our children in society today. More and more children are finding it necessary to learn more and to study harder in order to compete in the job market, which is, for the majority of the children, an important aim in life. Swami Satyananda has always stressed the need for the basics of education for all children in order to prepare them for society, which they will join when they reach adulthood. The need for stress management has reached the point where school psychologists are looking to yoga as a means to this end. They have come to realize that yoga has more to offer than just physical postures, i.e. another form of physical education. Of course, yoga offers many different ways to help the children to achieve relaxation and the removal of stress.

Yoga nidra: relaxed alertness

Foremost among the techniques of yoga for bringing about a state of relaxation is yoga nidra, which is well explained in Chapter 23: Yoga Nidra and Other Meditations for Children. However, one has to remember that yoga nidra with children should be structured according to age. Very young children

can do yoga nidra, but it must be very short and contain lots of visualization. As mentioned earlier in this book, a child's consciousness is still very close to the state of *turiya*, intuitive awareness, so it does not take much to bring them back to this state, which can be frightening for them when they go so deeply.

When yoga nidra is done with children between the ages of two and five, often they do not know the difference between right and left, so it is not necessary to try to take them through all the individual parts of the body. Instead, they are asked to move their toes and then make them still again, move their feet and then let them be still again. Like this, one continues throughout the body.

Visualization should begin with familiar objects for this age group, e.g. their pet, daddy's car, their house, etc. Of course, at this age, yoga nidra when used as the child starts to sleep, is a very important way of planting information deep into their minds. Children who are listening to the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, very soon are able to recite whole chapters without actually studying the texts. Any material or *sankalpa* spoken to the child in this state, goes in deeply and becomes a part of their *samskaras*, their character formation. A daughter of one of my student's could recite Mahamrityunjaya mantra before she was two years old, because instead of reading her bedtime stories, the father did the mantra with her until she was well asleep.

Between the ages of six to twelve years, the rotation of awareness through the body should be short, but they can distinguish the right foot and left foot, right leg and left leg, and so on. Visualization for this age can take on less familiar objects, like imagining themselves in a low flying airplane, looking out the window and seeing the objects on the ground. These children can also be aided in learning and developing positive *sankalpas*, resolves, and *samskaras*, character formation, if yoga nidra is used when the child goes to bed.

A mother who was practising yoga nidra with a tape made for use by adults decided that her nine-year-old son should

learn and practise yoga nidra. So she asked him to lie down and she played the cassette that she had been using. When the twenty-five minute practice was over and the child sat up, he requested his mother to, "Please, never do that to me again. I wanted to move but couldn't." Again, this points to the fact that the child's consciousness was close to the state of turiya; he went so deeply into the practice that he became very frightened. It will probably be some time before he will want to even try the practice again. Under these circumstances, using yoga nidra as he goes to sleep at night would be the answer.

After thirteen years of age, rotation of awareness and visualization can become more like the practice given for adults. But one can still use the practices for making learning much easier.

A fourteen-year-old student was preparing for his Ordinary Level exams at an English school. His sister, who was practising and teaching yoga, persuaded him to use yoga nidra as a way to help himself receive better marks. As preparation for the O Level exams, the teacher was giving the students a timed essay every Friday. On his first essay he received thirteen out of twenty possible marks, with many comments by the teacher as to how he could have improved his essay.

So, he decided to follow his sister's advice and try using yoga. He read onto a cassette the chapter of history on which he would have to write his next timed essay. His sister prepared his blanket and put on the cassette with the short yoga nidra practice and when it was finished, put on his prepared tape of the chapter of history. This he listened to several times during the week and when he had to write the timed essay, he found that he remembered many more of the important points. He received sixteen out of twenty possible marks, with the comment from the teacher being "excellent". His marks for the third essay were eighteen out of twenty, and again with the same comment from the teacher.

After this, his sister did not need to do any preparations for him; he was convinced that yoga nidra was a way to learn easily. He wrote twenty essays that year in preparation for his O Level exams. His average grade for all the essays, including the first one, was seventeen – an ‘A’. The remarks from the teacher on all the later essays was “excellent, high standard maintained.” He received top marks in his O Level exams and, using the same technique, went on to receive top marks in his Advanced Level exams. He was offered a place at the local university and received a double First Level, a unique achievement. He is now a banker in London. So, yoga nidra is not only an excellent relaxation exercise for the teenager, but is an efficient way of learning without stress.

Trataka: fixed gazing

Trataka is considered a part of the cleansing practices of yoga – using the natural body tears for flushing the eyes. But the practice of trataka has more to offer the students than just for using as an eye-wash. With the practice of trataka one can develop the ability to observe one’s own faculty of concentration and regular practice develops the attention span, concentration and therefore memory. Observing the counter-image on the retina of the object of steady gazing, when the object begins to move away out of the centre, if one observes their own mind, they will realize that another thought is beginning to enter the mind. When the counter-image starts to move either up, down, or to the right or left, know that the mind is losing concentration and by bringing the counter-image back into the centre, one focuses the mind again. Like this, with practice, one is able to maintain the counter-image for longer periods and this is easily transferred to other areas of learning where mental focus is necessary. Trataka is also very useful for helping those who have trouble sleeping. Research seems to indicate that it causes an increase of melatonin in the brain which helps with being able to sleep naturally.

For the practice of trataka one may use a word, picture, mandala or candle flame. With younger children, it is usually recommended that a word, picture or mandala is used, unless they are helped by the parent or guardian, as a lit candle, when left unguarded or in the hands of small children, can be dangerous and cause fires. These images can also be used in the daytime so there is no need to darken the room. Children between the ages of six and twelve years have said that using trataka on spelling words helps them to remember and get better marks at school. With older adolescents, they can use the candle flame, which is very efficient for being able to see the counter-image and also for being able to develop the ability to hold the image steady in the centre of the forehead inside. Usually, when using the candle flame it is necessary to darken the room, to ask the children to sit completely still while practising and to have the room as wind-still as possible, so that the candle flame is steady and not moving or flickering. Otherwise it is difficult to hold the counter-image steady. For anyone suffering from epilepsy, it is recommended that they should *not* use the candle flame for this practice, and the candle flame should never be used while wearing glasses or contact lenses.

The practice of trataka takes very little time, but is very effective in bringing about a state of relaxation and helps in the development of concentration.

Nada yoga: listening and hearing

The practice of nada yoga helps to bring about a state of calm in the mind because when we are producing the ‘mmmmm’ sound, the brain wave patterns tend toward the ‘a’ range. Alpha brain wave rhythms are associated with relaxation. Again, this is a simple practice that requires very little time and most children love it. It simply requires closing the ears with the index fingers, breathing in deeply and humming out for as long as possible, listening to the humming sound from the beginning to the end. As they practise this more and more, the breath will become longer and the concentration will improve

as well. After about five minutes of this humming with the ears and eyes still closed, they are asked to stop humming, but to continue listening with the ears closed. After a short time, they are asked to remove the fingers from the ears and then to rub their hands together and palm their eyes before opening them.

This technique of nada yoga, bhramari pranayama, is being used in hospitals before operations and before and during delivery at childbirth with great success. Before an operation, it means less anaesthesia is needed to render the patient asleep, so it is less costly for the hospital and safer for the patient. When used during childbirth, women experience less pain during the natural delivery. Like most of the other yoga techniques, nada yoga is not only important for removing stress, but aids learning and overcoming physical pain.

Visualization test

This practice can be used in combination with all the three above mentioned stress management techniques. In this practice the children are asked to try and see the inside of their forehead, like looking at a blackboard. They are asked to imagine they have a piece of white chalk and they should print their name on the blackboard. Children up to about six or seven years will actually raise their hands as if printing. Usually, that is only the first line on this internal blackboard and many different colours of chalk can be used for the second, third, fourth and fifth lines. The different lines can include numerals, e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or letters of the alphabet, e.g. a, b, c, d, e, or geometrical patterns, such as a circle, square, upright triangle, inverted triangle, etc. They can also be asked to print or write their resolve, the wish for what they want for themselves, as one of the lines on the blackboard. When they have finished, they should be asked to look at the blackboard and read all the lines again, seeing them in the colour they used. Then, they are asked to take the eraser, or cloth, and wipe the blackboard clean before bringing their minds back outside and finally opening their eyes.

DHARANA

Chidakasha dharana: looking at the internal space

Children like magic and many take great pains to learn simple magic tricks. So, anything they think is magical, they are interested in. The following practice is very good for developing their visualization and at the same time helps to awaken the symbology of the subconscious mind



Touring the Magician's Tower

The children should sit quietly or they may lie down in shavasana.

They are asked to be aware of their body and make it still but as comfortable as possible.

You are going on a tour in your mind of the magician's tower.

You are going to see many different and magical things in this tower.

Try to imagine and see, if you can, a picture of what is going to be described to you as you are led through this tower, one level after the other.

So, imagine that you are standing in front of the magician's tower.

You can see the path that leads to his/her tower and can see the trees around it with a lot of different flowers growing along the path. You can smell the fragrance of these flowers, and see their many different colours.

You can hear birds singing in the trees and when you look up you see the blue sky and puffy white clouds, it is like a beautiful summer day. You also see the magician's tower in front of you, which is tall and round.

To enter the door to the tower you have to say in your mind the magic words to open it, which are '*Om shanti, Om satyam*'.

You enter the door to the magician's tower and you see the room on the first level has windows all around.

In the centre of this room you see a large yellow cube which has a slight indentation in the top.

In that indentation is a red inverted triangle and in front of that inverted red triangle you can see a pale green rod, like a magician's rod that has a small pink snake curled around it three and a half times.



It is a small cobra that has its head up, its hood open and its tiny tongue flicking out.

So you have a good look at this yellow cube with the inverted red triangle and the pale green magician's rod on the top and you see the tiny snake there. You can see all these things clearly and you can also see the steps that lead to the second level of the tower.

You enter the second level of the tower and it is completely dark.

You can see nothing at first so you have to pause until your eyes become accustomed to the darkness.

Once your eyes get adjusted to the darkness, you can see at first a small white crescent moon, but when you keep looking you see that it is resting on a black sphere that has the lower crescent light blue.

All this darkness makes you feel a little sleepy, but you see the teleport that will take you to the next level of the tower so you step inside.

You enter the third level of the tower and it is lit with reddish light.

In the centre of this room you see a yogi seated in padmasana. He/she is seated on a tiger's skin and has his/her body completely smeared with ashes, with eyes closed in deep meditation. There is



a ring of fire surrounding the yogi and as you watch this ring of fire begins to spin around and around.

When it finally stops spinning, it unfolds like a golden lotus flower and the yogi is still seated in the centre, but now he is clad in white, but is still in deep meditation.

You see this beautiful golden lotus flower with the meditating yogi seated in its centre, but you also can see the way up to the fourth level.

When you enter the fourth level of this magician's tower you see that it doesn't look like a room at all, but looks like a small lake.

You see the water of this lake and you can see a small island in the centre of this lake.

The shore of this island is not made up of sand or stones but sparkling gems.

As you reach this shore you see the diamonds, rubies, emeralds and many other precious jewels, but you are not interested in them because you can see trees and a path that is leading to the centre of the island.

When you pass through the trees you come to a clearing and you see a large tree in the very centre and underneath the tree the guru is sitting.

So you go to the guru and kneel down and greet him/her and give the guru all your worries, troubles, anxieties and cares.



He/she gives you their blessing and you feel a real sense of peace of mind. He/she reminds you to be careful what you think because you have just passed under the wish-fulfilling tree.

You enjoy being there with the guru, but again you see the teleport so you step inside to get to the next level.

So you take your leave from the guru and follow the path again and

cross the shore of jewels and reach the steps leading upward.

As you enter this fifth level of the magician's tower, it is also a bit dark, it is a blue black darkness like the mid-night summer sky in many northern countries, a dark blue black.



In the centre at this level is a white light, like the flame of a candle, but it is steady and unwavering. It is emitting this steady white light. Being on this level makes you feel loving towards all things, and you feel as if you have only friends and no enemies. This is a very nice level to be on, but you can already see the way up to the next level.

When you enter the sixth level of the magician's tower you are astounded at its size. It is immense. It makes all the other levels look very tiny. It has a pale silvery light in this level, like the light of the full moon.

As you cross this level you can feel it is a bit cool and you feel as if there is a slight mist.

You can taste a sweet taste on your lips as you are crossing this immense level of the tower, but you see the way up to the next level.

Even before you reach the seventh level you can hear a sound coming from it. It is the sound AUM. As we enter this seventh level the sound gets louder and louder and we see that in the centre of this level is an immense golden egg and that is where the sound is coming from. That beautiful golden egg is emitting this sound and as we cross the level of the golden egg, the sound becomes so intense that we feel a bit dizzy, or maybe slightly sleepy once again. But we have seen the way up to the top level so we head for it.



As we enter this top level we are simply amazed. It is like being outdoors again.



We can see the blue sky, the sun shining; we can see the clouds, hear the birds in the trees.

But we also see a small well so we go to it and remove its cover.

This well is also magical and to get to the bottom of this well we are going to have to climb.

As we climb up we see the wall of the well is made of beautiful jewels, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and so on, but again they do not interest us.

When we have climbed up to the bottom of the well we see there the crystal clear water so we will have a drink while we are here.

There is a gourd for drinking so we take it and fill it with the water from this well.

As we drink this water, it is almost sweet to taste which is nice, but the way it makes us feel is even nicer.

When we drink the water we immediately feel totally refreshed, renewed, invigorated and cleansed.

We feel totally peaceful and relaxed but full of energy.

So we put down the gourd and start to climb down to get out of the well.

We replace its lid and start for the door that will take us back down from the tower.

We hear the *Om* before entering level seven and feel a bit dizzy as we pass the golden egg at the centre of this level.

In the sixth room, the immense silvery moon lit room we feel the coolness and again can taste the sweetness on the lips. As we pass back through the fifth room, in its blue black darkness we see the unwavering light of the candle flame that is emitting a steady white light.

On the fourth level we again cross to the jewelled shore of the island and again go to greet the Guru and receive



his/her blessings, which again gives us the great feeling of being without troubles or worries.

Reaching the third level we pass the meditating yogi, still clad in white, seated inside the beautiful golden lotus flower.

Entering the second level we pause to get accustomed to the darkness, but quickly we see the white crescent moon that is resting on the black sphere whose lower crescent is a pale blue.

Back in the first level we can see clearly in this sunlit room, the large yellow cube in the centre that has the inverted red triangle and the pale green magician's rod with the tiny snake coiled around it three and a half times.

To open the tower door again we will need to say the magic words to leave and this time we have to say '*Om satyam, Om shanti*' in our minds to get the door open.

Once outside we see the path, the trees, the flowers, the sky, the clouds and everything.

We have been on a marvellous magical tour of the magician's tower.

So now we can feel our body and move our hands and arms and our feet and legs then rub our hands together and cover our eyes before opening them and looking at the inside of the palms.

Then we can uncover the eyes and slowly look around the room at the others and give them all a great big smile.

Hari Om Tat Sat

KIRTAN AND MANTRA CHANTING

As a means of bringing about discipline with younger children, kirtan is one of the easiest. Even the youngest of children respond favourably to kirtan. It is often a very good way to start a class, not only with children but adults. Music is a universal language so speaks to all of us in a way that causes us to respond favourably. Kirtans may be sung in many different

languages and often the children enjoy learning words in different languages so have no intellectual attitudes about them. *Kirtans* are sound vibrations set to music, so it does not matter whether you know what you are saying when you sing them; the effect on the brain is what is important as far as yoga is concerned. Some of the important mantras and kirtans for use with children are listed below.

*Om bhurbhuva, suvah
Tatsaviturvarenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yo nah prachodayaat*

Om namah shivaya

*Om namah shivaya bolo
Om namah shivaya*

*Om tryambakam yajaamahe
Sugandhim pushtivardhanam
Urvaarukamiva bandhanaat
Mrityormukshiya maamritaata*

Om namo bhagavate vasudevaya

Om namo narayana

<i>Anandoham anandoham</i>	I am bliss, I am bliss
<i>Anandam brahmanandam</i>	Bliss, cosmic bliss

*Shivoham shivoham
Sachchidanando ham*

*Wide wide as the ocean
High as the heaven above.
Deep deep as the deep blue sea
Is the grace of guru's love.
I feel so unworthy
Yet I'm a child of his care.
For his word teaches me
And his love reaches me everywhere.*

*Vajrasana, padmasana,
Siddhasana, sukhhasana
Sitting in the asanas
Sitting in the asanas
Sitting in the asanas
Sitting in the asanas.*

*When the day is dark and dreary
And the way seems hard to find.
Don't let your heart feel weary
Just keep one thought in mind.
It is better to light one little candle
than to stumble in the dark
Better by far to light one little candle,
all you need is a tiny spark.
Let us all say a prayer that we all should be free
And a wonderful dawn of a new world we'll see.
So if everyone would light one little candle
What a wonderful world it would be.*

*Lord let me see your face in every face I see
Lord let me feel your grace, feel your grace in me.
Lord let me find a space where you want me to be
And Lord let me find a place that brings me nearer to thee.*

*Dance, dance wherever you may be
For I am the Lord of the Dance said he (she).
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be
And I'll lead you all, in the dance said he.*

*Door of my heart open wide I pray to thee.
Open wide, open wide,
Open wide and set me free.*

23

Yoga Nidra and Other Meditations for Children

Swami Yogaratna Saraswati

YOGA NIDRA

The practice of yoga nidra (YN), as we know it for adults, must be adapted to suit children. Basically, children can relax very quickly, but cannot remain in a state of deep relaxation for very long because they are so full of young life and energy. So YNs for children must be very short. Instead of the usual thirty to forty-five minutes, especially for younger children, they can be much shorter, about five to fifteen minutes, depending on age.

Adults need to be taken gradually step by step, spending time to establish the particular state of mind of each step, e.g. listening to sounds, mental rotation around the body, breath awareness, etc. If we spent the same amount of time doing all this with children, they would soon get restless and then bored and want to get up and do something else. So children's YN can be very short; each step can be done separately as a complete practice.

Children can go very deep into their consciousness quite easily. They are much more familiar and comfortable with their inner world than are adults. When doing YN with them, we can skip the preliminaries and go to the deeper stages of the YN soon after they are in shavasana and have internalized, omitting the usual preliminary steps.

Because children are so full of energy, you may have noticed that they do not lie still when in shavasana. That is quite okay; let children wriggle around if they wish and you will even find them peeking to see what is happening. We do not need to insist that they are still, as is appropriate for adults. As long as they do not touch neighbouring children in shavasana or make distracting sounds, be a bit lenient with them, especially the younger ones; you'll find they still experience the instructions that you are giving them even if you think they were not paying attention and were distracted.

With adults we usually give a long YN at the end of a yoga session, after asana and pranayama, or by itself. With children we can give frequent short YNs interspersed between the practices or groups of practices, much like we give shavasana (corpse pose) to adults. But this shavasana can be a deeper, more interesting, internalizing YN. It can be a way to relax the children in between practices, to make them aware of their internal world or their breath, or whatever we wish, to develop their imagination and concentration/focusing, etc., without spending a long time on any one YN session. For example, we might start with a short YN to help them be aware of the activities they have just done before the class, and/or to centre themselves in the present moment. Or, if we start with singing or chanting, we can follow it with a short, but deep YN visualizing children (themselves or others) sitting and chanting and 'seeing' the vibrations of the singing/chanting.

After surya namaskara (sun salutations), shavasana is essential and this is an ideal time to use the breath awareness section of YN to help them develop awareness of the movement of the breath and to watch the breathing normalize. Whereas with adults we would simply watch the breath, with children we could add a bit of fantasy and interest by linking the movement and rhythm of breathing with some other rhythmic action, such as bubbles getting bigger and smaller (see *Yoga Nidra*, chapter on 'Yoga Nidra for Children'), or a child on a swing or water rocking a boat or waves washing up on a beach, etc. After surya namaskara,

we could do visualizations of the rising sun in a variety of situations or landscapes, or the sun's energy filling and revitalizing the child.

Children are very imaginative and open to our suggestions, so we can use our imagination to stimulate theirs. In other words, 'the sky's the limit' as to what you can do in a YN for children, whether it be after surya namaskara or at any time. YN can also be done after a group of asanas, for example, 'animal asanas' or 'alphabet asanas', and the short YN should include related visualizations connected with the topic: animals or alphabets, etc., so that the mental yoga ties in with the physical ones and the children can get a complete experience of a link up with different aspects of their personality or being.

When introducing or discussing yoga practices with children, feel free to discuss the terminology as if introducing new vocabulary, as we would do in a classroom. They can understand concepts much more easily than we think. For example, after the first or second visualization session we can ask them:

Q: "What did you see when you were lying down in shavasana?"

A: "Birds, my house, etc."

Q: "Where did you see that?"

A: "In the forest/sky/in my head."

Q: "But I didn't see you go out of this room, you were here, where did you see them?"

A: "In my head."

Q: "Yes, and that place is called 'chidakasha'. Do you remember dreams sometimes? That place we see them is called 'chidakasha'. Can you remember that word? (write it on the board). When I say that word will you understand and remember what it means?" etc.

Sankalpa (resolve, positive suggestion, affirmation), breath awareness, and many such concepts can be understood by children after an initial explanation. Thus, it is much easier for both teacher and pupils to discuss and understand the concepts when we have labels for them.

Developing creativity

Apart from all the other benefits, YN is a great way to encourage creativity in children. We can do practices such as the following (suitable for a variety of ages: 7–17 years):

Meeting the forest friend

Ideal after a dynamic practice like surya namaskara.

Lie down in shavasana.

Feel your body on the floor. (etc.)

Now let your mind fly away like a bird in the air.

Fly up and away to a thick green forest.

You can see the green tree tops swaying in the breeze.

You fly down in through the leaves, into the tree, into the forest and land on a branch on the ground.

Look all around and notice everything you can see: the trees, flowers, leaves, birds and animals.

You see one creature, a bird or animal near you very clearly.

Notice what kind of creature it is, the shape, (pause) the colour, (pause) the size. (pause)

As you look, you realize it's talking to you and that you can understand its language.

What is it saying?

You discover you can talk its language.

Have a conversation with it. (pause)

Make friends with it. (pause) Tell your name and find out its name.

What else happens?

Now, remember your new 'forest friend' and say "good bye" and arrange to meet again next time.

Now fly back to your body like a bird flying home.

Feel your body on the floor. (etc.)

When you're ready, sit up. (palming if appropriate)

Turn to your neighbour, the person sitting next to you, and share/tell about the creature you saw in chidakasha. (Some can be chosen to share with the whole group.)

In the above YN, the child sees their own 'creature', not one suggested by you, so they use their imagination. This can be done in a number of ways, adjusted according to the age of the child, the topics covered in their class (if being done in school) or the yoga class. We can return the children to their forest friend through YN on a regular basis and develop an on-going relationship with it. Children who have a 'secret' or 'inner' friend have a healthy and active 'inner world' and grow up to be much more centred and secure adults.

Thus, we can also use the YN for introducing a child to their 'inner' or 'secret' friend and to develop an inner relationship with this 'inner friend' in chidakasha; a friend the child can have adventures with. When the teacher accepts this is not 'make believe' or a 'lie', it enables the child to accept this inner reality and the inner world, and to be able to discriminate between inner and outer worlds. This is especially psychologically healthy for lonely or only children. The 'inner friend' or 'secret friend' is a manifestation of the inner or higher Self.

Another way to develop the child's ability to 'see' in the inner world of chidakasha is to do visualization exercises, such as discussed in the chapter on Chidakasha Dharana, in *Dharana Darshan*.

Writing on the inner black board

Visualize you are standing in front of a blackboard.

There are some coloured chalks. Pick up a pink chalk, feel the shape and chalkiness on your fingers.

Write your name in capitals on the board in pink chalk.

See it clearly.

Put the chalk back, pick up a green chalk.

Under your name write your address/your school name/etc.

See it clearly.

Put the green chalk back, pick up a blue chalk.

Write your favourite thing/food/song/friend/etc.

See it clearly.

Now stand back and see the whole board with what you've written as if you're taking a photo of it.

Smell the chalk.

Now come back to your body like a bird flying home.

Feel the solidity of your body on the floor.

Have a big stretch, wiggle your toes and sit up.

For subsequent practices, more detailed instructions can be given, also for older children.

A similar practice can be done using a new exercise book:

Smell the smell of a new exercise book.

Feel the cover and see the cover.

Turn the pages over, feel the pages with your fingers.

See the ruled lines, what colour are they? etc.

In the margin of the first line write '1'.

Beneath that, on the second line write '2'.

Beneath it write '3'.

And so on and so forth with a list of things or a summary that they want to remember.

The exercises above and below are also very useful for developing a photographic memory.

A similar practice can be done with a combination of *trataka* (see *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One* and *Meditations from the Tantras*) and visualization (see earlier in this chapter).

Another way of developing imagination and sensibility in YN is to ask the children (while lying in *shavasana*):

Feel that you are a twig or log on the ground.

Feel the shape of your body as a twig.

Feel it pressing on the ground.

Now feel ants crawling over your twig-body, without moving.

Notice for yourself, what do the ants feel like?

Now a butterfly lands on your body, how does that feel?

A caterpillar crawls over your twig-body. How does it feel?

Now a bird picks up your twig-body and flies up through the air.

How does that feel?

The bird puts your twig-body in its nest.

There are baby birds there. How do they look? How do they sound? What do they do?

Now transform your twig- or log-body back into your child's body and notice how you feel.

The teacher should see which situations are relevant to the children. If they do not have much experience of twigs and caterpillars and birds and nests, then it would be better to say a shoe, sock, toy, pencil, game boy, or something the children can easily relate to. It is important as yoga teachers to be creative and make things up based on the children's life situations or needs, the class theme, etc.

Developing witness awareness

Part 1

Let your mind fly like a bird up and a little away.

You can see your body lying on the ground as if you are looking at someone else's body.

Notice the clothes that you're wearing.

Notice the shape of your body.

Notice the position of your arms and legs.

Notice the expression on your face, etc.

How do you feel?

Part 2

Once they are familiar with doing Part 1, repeat it and then add:

See yourself doing something you do every day like brushing your teeth/taking a bath/eating/watching TV/etc.

The teacher can use appropriate and different activities each session.

How do you look? How do you feel?

Part 3

Once they can do Part 2 easily, then do Part 1 and add:

See yourself with your friend, playing or talking or doing something together as if you're watching a video of yourself.

Do you look funny? or serious?

Part 4

A good visualization, especially for children who live away from their parents, in a boarding school, or with only one parent and who miss their parents.

Let your mind fly like a bird to your house where your parents/mother/father lives.

See the street as a bird would see it.

See the house from the sky.

Now you are on the street in front of your house.

You see the front door.

Your mother or father or your parents are at the door.

You can see them smiling at you, they love you and are pleased to see you.

You run up to them and they hug you.

Feel the warmth of their bodies as they hug you, enjoy that feeling.

If tears come to the children, just let it happen.

See them clearly, what clothes are they wearing?

You all go into the house.

See the first room clearly, and the other rooms.

Now you spend time with your parents/mother/father.

Perhaps in the kitchen, garden, playing or watching TV together.

What do they say? What do you say?

Be with them now, see and feel everything clearly.

Now prepare to come back. Notice how you feel now.

And remember that you *can* be with them any time you want, in your chidakasha.

Now fly back to your body like a bird flying home, etc.

This is also good for a child who has lost a parent(s) or relatives. Instead of trying to avoid thinking about them, they can relive the happy times and get energy and a feeling of nurturing from these memories within, through the YN. They can do it as they go to sleep at night if they miss a loved one. This will heal and help the child to have a healthy and balanced personality.

Developing the ability to visualize

A good way of developing the ability to visualize (in the beginning) is to choose familiar things, e.g. one's house (good for all ages including adults):

Now you are going to take a mental photo of **the house where you live**.

Let your mind fly up and away.

You find you are standing in the street in front of your house.

You can see the front, is there a wall or a fence?

If so, you can see behind that. Is there a yard or a garden?

A driveway or a garage?

See clearly what is in front of the house.

Now, see the shape of the house.

Is it an apartment building, a bungalow type?

A cottage, a small house?

See your house clearly in your mind.

What colour is it?

See the front door.

See the windows.

What is the roof like?

Is there a driveway, garage, garden?

See it all very clearly.

Now you are taking a photo of your house. **CLICK!**

You see the whole thing at once, like a photo.

Keep the photo with you in your mind, in your chidakasha.

And now fly back to your body like a bird flying home.

Bring back the photo.

Feel your body on the floor.

Wriggle your fingers and toes, have a big stretch.

When you're ready, gently getting up, keeping your eyes closed.

Finish off with palming.

Without looking at anyone or talking to anyone, start **drawing the photo of your house** that you saw in your chidakasha. Draw it on the paper beside you (keep papers and drawing implements ready beside each child before

the meditation).

Try to draw it quickly from what you saw in your mind without using an eraser. (1–10 minutes)

No talking, no looking at what others are doing.

Just draw what you saw in your chidakasha, your house.

The teacher can now walk quietly around the room, seeing that the children are drawing and not disturbing each other. If we find children who are hesitating, quietly encourage them by saying (whispering) things like:

Is there a wall in front? Draw that.

What is the shape of the whole building? Good.

How is the roof? Good.

Where is the front door, windows, etc?

Discourage the use of rulers and erasers. Creativity will flourish if they practise free hand drawing.

Give them a warning before the end:

You have two minutes left to finish off your drawing.

Make sure you have the whole house, the roof, etc.

Time is up, pencils down, stop drawing please.

Now look at your drawing and notice how you feel by looking at it.

Now get up with your drawing and go to someone whose house you have not seen before.

Sit down with them and show your drawing and explain everything about your drawing. When one has finished, the other person can tell about their drawing.

This practice/exercise helps the child to develop the ability to visualize, translate or transfer that visualization from the subtle chidakasha level to the external, grosser, physical level. They also learn to verbalize about their inner experiences. It helps them to get confidence to verbalize with others who are less familiar (someone whose house you have not seen). Conversation skills are developed about a neutral topic. This gives children the confidence to express themselves using what they can see in their inner world.

It is quite useful every now and then to ask children to turn to their neighbour, the person sitting beside them, and

share/tell about what they saw/experienced/felt/etc. This gives children a chance to talk, which they usually want to do in class, a chance to express their excitement and enthusiasm. It also helps them to overcome shyness about such topics.

Many times when young children talk to adults about some fantasy (they have experienced in *chidakasha*), the adult responds with, “Don’t tell lies. You are just making it up, it’s all your imagination, it’s not real.” This very effectively kills the child’s capacity to experience their inner world and they become inhibited about such things in later life. By encouraging them in the yoga class to express themselves about experiences in their inner world, they realize that they are not the only one able to see their inner world and thus they can gain confidence in trusting their inner experiences.

When children (or anyone) talk about their inner experience, the best thing is to listen quietly with a few encouraging words and a smile. Never judge or analyze, just accept quietly. This way the children will blossom and gain confidence in their own experience. Often, their sharing can give the teacher ideas for future visualizations.

A word about discipline

Although letting the children express and show their experiences is good, the teacher should be in control. A yoga class can be very noisy at times. Children will roar like a lion in *simhagarjanasana* (roaring lion), and squeal with delight and excitement. Let them be noisy when it is appropriate, without disturbing others. At other times during YN or meditations, the teacher can be quite insistent that there should be no noise or touching each other. When quiet is necessary for internalization, encourage it. Children who are a problem, who like to distract others, should be asked to sit near the teacher so that you (the teacher) can look directly at them when giving instructions, as if they are the only one in the room. When they get too restless, just gently rest your hand

on their knee (of younger children, not teenagers) and your calmness and contact will help them to settle down. When they start behaving as we want, reward them with a smile, a word of encouragement, a small responsibility. They can be asked to demonstrate, but as soon as they start to fool around again, they can be sent out of the class. When they are very good, they can be asked, after demonstrating, to go around and help a particular child who needs assistance. This will give them the attention (and responsibility) that they need to keep their monkey minds positively engaged and also learn to use their intelligence and energy in a more positive way. (The trouble makers are usually the brighter children.)

If the class is very big, the teacher can have a signal which means 'silence', e.g. an office bell, gong or alarm clock. When things get too out of hand, a great way to get their attention is to start playing a simple game like 'Simon Says': the teacher can say, "hands on head", putting hands on head, hands on shoulders, hands on knees, or whatever, demonstrating each time. Then demonstrate something wrong, saying, "hands on head", but showing hands on knees. Then, like a game or joke, point to the ones who had their hands on the wrong place and say, "Out!" All the children soon join in and once they have all joined in, we can proceed with the lesson. The children love this little game and it immediately brings their attention back to the class.

Another trick for getting children to move quickly and quietly from one activity to another, for example, to get their colours and paper from their bags in preparation for a drawing activity, is to say something like, "Now we will do some drawing. By the time I count to five, be sitting quietly with your paper or book ready and your coloured pencils/felt pens." Then slowly and loudly the teacher counts, "1, 2, 3, 3½, 4, 4½, 4¾ . . .", watching how they are managing and adapting the speed of counting accordingly. If some big children are ready and little ones are struggling, we can ask the bigger children to help the smaller ones

in between counting. “4, 5/8, 5! Now, pens down, eyes up!” This trick of counting can be used at any time, for example, to be sitting perfectly for a meditation practice, or to move into the next asana, or into a starting position or to end the class.

After yoga nidra

Asking the children to draw after YN is a good way to develop their imagination, self-expression, creativity and confidence. We can also ask them, after (or in the next session of) a painting/art/creative activity class, to lie down in shavasana and then enter into their picture/object, explore it and see how it changes/develops. After this they can do more work on their picture/art work (do another version: part 2). This process is also useful for adults and anyone in the creative line.

Similarly, children can be asked to write a poem or story or to express how they feel/felt, or to mime or dramatize. They can be given the option of drawing or writing, as all may not be able to express themselves in the same way.

Further practices

The following visualizations are good for developing observation, awareness and memory. After settling themselves in shavasana, with the usual preliminaries, ask the children to:

1. Imagine you are **lying on your bed in your own room.**

Feel the softness and firmness of the bed underneath you.

Now imagine you are looking at the ceiling of your room.

What can you see? What colour is it? Are there any cracks or patches?

Is there a light or fan hanging from the ceiling? What else can you notice about the ceiling?

Now notice the walls. What colour are they? What are the walls like?

See the windows. Where are they in the room? Are they open or closed?

Are there curtains or grills?

Is there any thing hanging on the walls: pictures or posters?

See the door of your room. Is there anything hanging on the door?

Notice what furniture there is. A cupboard?

Is there anything on the top of it or stuck on it?

Is there a table? What's on the table? See clearly what's on the table.

Your books, toys, pens, hairbrush, what can you see?

Now see the floor, what is it like? What colour is it? Is there a carpet or mat on it?

Is there anything else on the floor?

Now can you see under the bed? What can you see there?

Shoes, boxes, dust?

Now look around your room carefully and notice what else you can see that you didn't notice before.

Keep the picture of your room clearly in your mind/
chidakasha.

Gently come back to your physical body, feel it resting on the floor.

When you're ready, sit up and finish off with palming.

When the children sit up, ask them:

When you get home, really lie on your bed and repeat this practice.

Really look all around your room.

Notice everything you can see from your bed.

Especially notice the things you forgot to see in your chidakasha and to put those things in the mental picture of your room, because in the next class we will do it again and see how much you can remember then. This will really help you to develop a photographic memory.

This practice can be repeated from time to time adding variations like, see your brother/sister/parents/friends in your room. What are they doing? What are you doing together?

Or:

See your room very dirty and untidy. Now mentally tidy it up and clean it. Visualize you are doing it.

2. Imagine you are **going to school in the morning** as you do almost every day.

What is the first thing you see or meet when you leave your house?

Then further along the way, what do you see?

Remember the way to school, whether you go by bus, car, cycle or walking.

Remember and see all the things you usually see every day.

Where do you turn the corner? Cross the street? Meet your friends?

Do you walk past a special house, garden or shop?

Is there a dog or person that you see at the same place each day?

Retrace your way to school and notice everything you came across.

In the same order every day.

As you get closer to school, what do you see there?

You get near the school building, see it clearly.

How do you usually feel when you get near school?

Which friends do you see near the gate?

What do you do as soon as you go inside the school compound/yard?

Now you have arrived at school and we are finishing the practice.

Notice how you feel right now.

Now gently come back to your body like a bird flying home (etc.).

And end the practice in the usual way.

This practice can be repeated every now and then, at different times of the year, so that they notice how the environment changes at different times of the year.

3. It can also be done for **going home after school**. This will be very different, as how the child feels after school may be different. Asking them to do this and noticing how they feel, makes them more aware of a totally different experience of their being (in themselves). It makes them more aware of their deeper experiences.

4. This practice can also be done for **a particular route/way to a particular place**, e.g. if the children went out together on an excursion. Then afterwards, they can draw or write about it.
5. This can also be done as an advanced practice and for older children. After visualization of the way to school and the way back from school in separate sessions, you can speed it up, do **both journeys and compare** the way they feel during, or at the end of, the two journeys.
6. **Review of the day** can be done especially for older children. It can be talked through first so that they really understand the concept and what has to be done (see *Yoga Sadhana Panorama, Volume 2*, for further details).
Settle the children into shavasana in the usual way.
Remember the last thing you did just before lying down in shavasana, it may have been . . .
Remember what you did before that.
Remember what happened before that.
Keep remembering all the things that happened, one before the other, as if you are watching a video/movie or series of slides of yourself, but going backwards.
Remember how you felt at that moment.
Try to remember everything that happened right back to the time you woke up.
And remember waking up and lying in your bed.
Remember how you felt then.

Slowly externalize the children in the usual way.

This practice can be done regularly (by children and adults) and they will find that the awareness of everything that happens increases; the awareness of themselves, their reactions, details, etc. This observation will improve their awareness while things are actually happening in the present.

Children can be helped to overcome particular problems by being given individual YNs, or a YN can be done by the whole group, but aimed at one, or a group of children with specific problems. For example, a child who has trouble

getting on with others can be asked to visualize playing easily and harmoniously with others, enjoying themselves with others, cooperating and having fun with others. In this way, they can rehearse doing well in difficult situations and build up their confidence.

Before exams children can be asked to visualize themselves studying easily, the knowledge flowing from their study books into their eyes and brain. Then they can visualize themselves in the examination room, reading the questions and smiling and writing the answers easily and correctly. Then they can visualize themselves reading the marks card or marks board and looking happy because they did well. In this way they can develop positive images of themselves and use visual sankalpa (resolve/positive suggestion). YN on any fantasy subject is also good before exams to relieve examination stress.

Sankalpa

Sankalpa, resolve, positive suggestion or affirmation (see *Yoga Nidra*), is just as good for children as it is for adults. Older children may understand it better. They can mentally repeat their sankalpa, a short positive statement encapsulating their goal, three times in the YN practice. If it is a longer YN, they can repeat it three times at the beginning and three times again at the end of the practice. The children can be asked to visualize their sankalpa, as if it has already happened, similar to the practice described above. They can write it as ‘lines’ like an affirmation, instead of the tedious and detrimental practice of writing ‘lines’ in school such as, “I will not be naughty,” which never had a positive effect and only increased resistance and distaste for school. You can imagine what effect it would have writing “I am good and lovable.”

Experiencing the senses

It is good in YN for children to include experiences of all their senses in chidakasha. As well as visualizing visual things, they can be asked to taste things such as water, milk,

ice-cream, salty chips, coca cola, sea water, their favourite dish, their favourite vegetable or fruit, etc. They can be asked to visualize the smell of such things as: their favourite food cooking in the kitchen, rose flowers in the garden, freshly cut grass, an orange, any other favourite fruit, new school books, erasers and pencils, smelly clothes, hot soapy bath, etc.

They can be asked to hear things such as a school bell, alarm clock, distant TV, their favourite song, traffic on the street, parents working in the kitchen, the sound of washing up, the sound of the family car, cycle bell, the TV, etc.

They can be asked to feel things such as wet sandy beach under the bare feet, cold ground in winter, soft carpet, hot water, cold water, soft cat's fur, dog's fur, smooth plastic, rough stone, sticky glue or honey, etc.

For children who are less experienced, guessing games can even be arranged before these sense visualizations, e.g. blindfolded, they have to smell two to five different smells and say what they are. Older children could write them. Put four to six objects of different textures in a bag and the children have to put their hand into the bag, feel and guess what they are, e.g. piece of artificial fur, sandpaper, plastic pen, metal object (spoon), fruit, etc.

Tape a series of familiar sounds onto a cassette, along with a number said before the sound. Play it back and the children have to listen, write the number, and say, write or draw what the sound is.

Before bed

Something very easy for parents, or house parents of a residential school, is to read the children a story at night before they go to sleep – they can be in bed and tucked up. Start reading a story and when it is finished, ask them to think about it as they go to sleep. Or read the beginning of the story and they can think about how it will end. In the yoga class, we can tell or read the beginning of a story and ask the children to imagine how the story develops and ends.

Some suggestions should be given to help them, such as, “Something else came too, it was a . . . ?” or “They all went to . . . and did . . .”, “Then what happened?”, “. . . and finally they all . . . ” A lot of the helpful suggestions will depend on the story read out and our knowledge of the children themselves: at what level they are at, how imaginative they are, etc.

Another wonderful thing to do with children before going to bed is a little *Om* chanting, mantra chanting, singing or bhramari (humming breath). This is best done as a family group. There is nothing better than the whole family getting together and chanting *Om* seven, eleven, twenty-one or twenty-seven times together and then sitting quietly for a few minutes. Everyone can sit in a circle on a rug or the floor or more informally on the child’s bed. If this is too culturally strange for the whole family, getting together for a few minutes and telling about the day and how it went, an informal review of the day helps everyone to empty their minds, to share, to support and feel loved, to clarify.

Positive feedback

It is especially important for children not to receive any negative comments about their own personal experiences. Whether they share or talk about seeing imaginative fantasies, gods, demons or whatever, it is important for the yoga teacher to accept smilingly and to encourage observation and acceptance of one’s inner experience. There are no ‘should’ or ‘should not’ in YN or any other meditation or inner experience. When parents, teachers, peers, make comments or joke or laugh about the child’s experience of the inner world, this leaves a deep impression, especially for shy and sensitive children, and often inhibits them and their inner development.

Occasional sharing of YN experiences straight after the session with neighbouring children can do good in that it brings such matters out into the open. But there should be no comparison; no, “My visualization is better than

yours.” Most of us can remember some experience we had in childhood that we told about and were made fun of, and then we learned to ignore such experiences and turn away from the inner world.

Further practices

1. Imagine you are **lying in a boat** on a river or lake.

You can hear the sounds of the water against the sides of the boat.

You can feel the movement of the boat gently rocking on the water.

Feel the movement of your breath, being very careful not to change it.

It is like the movements of the boat on the water.

Feel the breath and the rocking of the boat gently relaxing you.

It is gently rocking you like a baby rocking in a cradle.

You feel very good, easy, relaxed.

The following is optional, depending on the age and attention span of the children or can be done as a separate practice.

2. You can see **mountains all around the water** covered with snow.

Snow capped mountains.

You can see green fields in the valley, tiny white sheep and shepherds.

You can see cows also. You can hear cow bells ringing.

Near the shore you can see lots of different coloured flowers.

You can smell the scent of the flowers on the cool/warm breeze.

You feel like you have been on a wonderful holiday. Notice how you feel.

Start them off in the same way, linking the movement of the breath with the movement of the boat in the water. Then make it a more active adventure.

3. You put your **hand into the water**.

(Take care that there are no children who are frightened of water before doing the following, or use it as a way to help them overcome their fear.)

You can feel the coolness and the wetness of the water on your hand.

You love water and swimming and you want to go for a swim.

So you dive off the boat and into the water.

You can swim easily. You swim down under the water.

You can see the bright light of the surface of the water.

You explore the bottom of the lake/river.

And you see many strange fish, notice the shapes and colours.

Strange plants, (pause) deep water creatures. (pause)

You find a sunken ship and explore it.

You find an ancient wooden box, half open.

You open it and find treasure, a special stone that shines and glows like a light.

You feel very calm and happy when you look at it.

You take it back with you to give it to someone whom you love very much.

Now swim back to the surface of the water and you see that person and give them this special treasure. Notice how you feel.

Externalize the children in the usual way.

The following practice can be split into two practices, following on from each other.

4a. Imagine you have arrived at your most **favourite holiday place**.

It is a place in nature, in the forest or by the sea or a river, or in the mountains or beside a waterfall or lake, or in a beautiful garden or on a farm.

These can be discussed before the practice; it can also be done after an excursion to a place of nature.

You've just arrived so look all around and notice clearly everything you can see.

Notice the details, the colours of everything you can see. Are there people or other children? Houses? Or just beautiful nature?

You've taken off your shoes. Now look where you're standing and feel the ground under your bare feet.

Is it sandy, grassy, a rock or something else?

Now look up at the sky. Can you see tree tops, clouds, mountain tops, the horizon?

Notice the weather and the view.

What sounds can you hear in your favourite holiday place?

What smells can you smell there? Can you smell sea breeze, or mountain air, or garden flowers?

Now spend some time playing or exploring and doing whatever you would like to do most in your special holiday place.

This is a very special place and whenever you come here you feel very well and happy and full of good energy.

Feel yourself filling up with this special good energy.

Finish off in the usual way.

4b. Can be done in a different session separately or following on from 4a.

You see a group of people and children.

They are **having a picnic** and they invite you to join them.

You see that some of your friends are already there.

You see some of your favourite foods and drinks.

Start eating and drinking.

Feel the food and drink in your mouth and taste them clearly.

Be aware of how much you are enjoying them.

You feel very full and satisfied. Feel it clearly.

Now gently come back, remembering your experiences.

Slowly externalize the children in the usual way.

This is a good practice to have them share with each other in pairs after their yoga nidra and will develop their imagination. Children inspire each other when they share

their experiences. They learn how to be more imaginative from other children and get new ideas.

4c. A similar creative visualization is **the secret garden**, a place where the children can take refuge and do whatever they want, have a secret friend, etc. This will give them a good deep relaxation, a deep experience of their inner world. It will develop their imagination and be a good relief for those who are suffering from external anxieties such as exam tension (which is becoming more and more common), family and home discord, peer pressure and peer conflict.

Settle the children down in shavasana in the usual way.

Let your mind fly like a bird, far away to a secret, enchanted garden. This is *your* special secret place that only you know about and only you can visit, unless you call others to join you. Whenever you go to your secret garden, you feel very good, very happy, and full of energy. And you can transform all your worries and troubles into strengths and opportunities. (simplify words for younger children)

You have just arrived in your secret garden, and you look around you, noticing the weather and the season.

You look in all directions and see clearly everything around you. Notice if anything has changed since the last time you were here. (use only after the first time visit)

Notice the ground, is it grassy, sandy, stony or what?

Look up and notice what you see.

Listen to what sounds you can hear.

Smell what lovely secret garden scents you can smell.

Now spend time exploring your secret garden.

You find that special place where you can let go of all your worries and problems. Perhaps someone is there to help you. Perhaps there's a special pool or stream or tree that takes them from you. Let them all out. Feel how light and refreshed you are now.

Now spend some time just playing, enjoying, relaxing, in whatever way you like, perhaps with your friends, other children, or whoever you like, or just by yourself.

Now you go to a special spot that energizes you and gives you everything you need. Perhaps it's a hill top with a beautiful view, or a special rock you can lie, sit or stand on, perhaps it's a special place in the sun, or a huge tree, or a special part of the garden.

Go there now and feel the specialness of this place.

Let your self breathe in all that good energy and fill yourself up with joy and goodness.

Now think of all the good things in your life. (discussion on this may need to be done beforehand)

Mentally say, "Thank you" to the universe for all the good things in life.

Then think of your parents, your friends, the other people you love, the people you know, see them in your mind.

Mentally send them your appreciation, good wishes and love; mentally let them be blessed.

Slowly externalize in the usual way and finish off with palming or in your usual way.

Breath awareness

There are many different ways breath awareness can be done with children which are elaborated in the book, *Yoga Nidra*. The main thing to remember is that with small children we really have to get them to understand what is breathing in and breathing out. They should know this so well that they can understand the instructions even with their eyes closed.

A good way to do this is for them to learn 'boat breathing' (see *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One*), and check while they are doing it that the breath is coming out of their nostrils when the abdomen goes in, and vice versa, by putting your finger or hand beneath their nostrils so that you can feel the warm exhaled breath.

Check the movement of their abdomen so that they are not just moving the stomach in and out independently of the abdomen, as sometimes happens when they have not properly understood the instruction. Older and more experienced children can assist the teacher with this by pairing up with

younger ones. Once they understand, then it is easy to proceed.

Breath awareness can even be done in a casual way with younger children by simply asking them to put their hands on their chest and stomach and seeing if they feel anything moving there. Ask them if they feel the air going in and out of their nose and remind them that is called the 'breath'. Then ask them to breathe in (short pause) and breathe out (short pause) a few times.

This process of checking if they understand 'breathing in and out' can be repeated when introducing the breathing pattern in surya namaskara (sun salutations).

With younger children, you can even give them balloons to blow up. You could explain that they have to 'blow out' into the balloon to fill it up with air, which has come from inside our lungs. They can then watch the air escape out of the balloon, realizing that our lungs work in a similar way to blowing up balloons, and is an excellent pranayama and lung strengthener.

It would also be good to tie this experiment in with a physics class on air and balloons.

When doing breath awareness for children, especially younger children, always make the practice short, maximum thirty seconds to two minutes, or five to twenty-seven counts. In the beginning, and with younger children, let breath awareness be done without counting. Instead, ask them to visualize or imagine some rhythmic movement along with the breath, such as a child on a swing, a boat rocking on the water, windscreen wipers on the car or a balloon getting bigger and bigger with each breath. There are some good exercises using breathing with geometric diagrams (as well as other pranayamas) in *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One*.

Other aspects of YN such as listening to sounds, sankalpa, rotation of awareness around the body and feeling of opposites, are well detailed in the publication *Yoga Nidra*, and can be easily adapted for use with children's YN.

PRANA NIDRA

Prana nidra (PN), alternate body-sides breathing, is a very effective practice which can be done during YN, for adults and any time in shavasana for children, for balancing the dual energies of *ida* and *pingala*, yin and yang, mental and physical energies, internalization and externalization, passive and active, creative and logical, left brain and right brain hemispheres, relaxation and activity, parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems respectively.

It helps to have a chart of the whole body silhouette with appropriate colours. They can even do their own drawings before and/or after their own experiences. (Especially good is to trace their body outline on a large sheet of paper or on the ground outside.) These practices are much easier to lead if you do them yourself first, then you do not have to think, just describe as you feel it for your self.

Before starting the practice, make sure the children are familiar with 'right' and 'left' and with 'right nostril' and 'left nostril'. Some simple games to consolidate this would be advisable. Simple *nadi shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing) can be introduced before or after prana nidra.

After settling the children into shavasana in the usual way, the following steps can be done as separate practices in the same order or gradually added on over time.

1. Feel (wiggle, or move) only your left hand and left arm.
Feel (wiggle, or move) only your right hand and right arm.
2. Feel (wiggle, or move) only your left leg and left foot.
Feel (wiggle, or move) only your right leg and right foot.
3. Feel only the left half of your face, left eye, left nostril, left cheek and jaw.
Feel only the right half of your face, right eye, right nostril, cheek and jaw.
4. Feel just the left half of the body, including the left leg, left arm and left half of the face.
Now feel only the right half of the body, including the right leg, right arm right half of the face.

5. See the bright, silvery full moon in the dark night sky on your left side.
See the sun shining brightly on your right side.
6. On your left side, see children sleeping, reading, studying at night time with the moon shining through the window.
On your right side, see children playing, laughing, running and jumping in the bright sunshine.
7. In your left hand, imagine you are holding a silver crescent moon. It feels cool.
In your right hand, imagine you are holding a bright golden sun. Feel the warmth.
8. Feel that you are breathing in from the moon in your left hand, up your left arm and shoulder, up your left nostril to your eyebrow centre and down the left arm again. (at a later stage, count 5–7 breaths)
Feel that you are breathing in from the sun in your right hand, up your right arm and shoulder, up your right nostril to your eyebrow centre and down the right arm again. Keep breathing in this way, natural breath. (at a later stage, count 5–7 breaths)
9. As for 8, but from the moon at the sole of the left foot, and from the sun at the sole of the right foot. (at a later stage, count 5–7 breaths)
10. As for 8 and 9, and feel your left side filling with silvery moonlight.
Feel your right side filling with golden sunlight.
11. As for 8, 9 and 10, together with the breath.
Breathing in silver moonlight up the left leg, left arm and left side of the body, all at the same time, to the eyebrow centre. Then breathe out again silver light down the whole left side of the body. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
Breathing in golden sunlight up the right leg, right arm and right side of the body, all at the same time to the eyebrow centre. Then breathe out again golden light down the whole right side of the body. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)

From now on, the same practices as above, but start breathing in and out on alternate sides as for nadi shodhana (alternate nostril breathing).

12. Feel that you are breathing in and up the left hand, arm and shoulder and left nostril to the eyebrow centre, and breathing out down the right nostril, shoulder, arm and hand. Feel that you are breathing in and up the right hand, arm, shoulder and right nostril to the eyebrow centre, and breathing out the left nostril, shoulder, arm and hand. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
13. Feel that you are breathing up the left foot, leg and left side of the body to the eyebrow centre and breathing out down the right side of the body, right leg and foot. Then feel that you are breathing in up the left foot, leg, and left side of the body side to the eyebrow centre and breathing out down the right body side, right leg and right foot. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
14. Same as for 12 and 13, breathing in both legs and arms and sides of the body and nostrils, etc., (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
15. Same as 14, with silver light on the left side, changing to golden light on the right side, etc., (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
16. Same as 15 with blue on the left side changing to red light on the right side. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)
17. Same as 15, with cool blue light on the left side and warm red light on the right side. (first without counting, then with counting 5–7 breaths)

The last stages are very advanced and should be done only if the children are very familiar with the practice and can do each stage easily. Many can do them easily, even more easily than adults. Whatever stage they can manage will give them great harmonizing benefits and concentration. The children love it. They are also very good at making up their

own visualizations and giving the practices to each other. Sometimes this can be done in pairs. Children can also be chosen to direct the class or smaller groups.

OTHER MEDITATIONS FOR CHILDREN

Most of the above practices are done lying down in shavasana. Other meditations, done sitting up, are also very effective for children and are detailed in books, such as: *A Systematic Course in the Tantric Practices of Yoga and Kriya*, *Meditations from the Tantras*, *Sure Ways to Self-Realization* and *Dharana Darshan*.

Ideal meditation practices for children include:

- Kaya sthairyam (psychic body stillness)
- Japa (*Om* chanting and mantra chanting)
- Ajapa japa (mantra with breath)
- Trataka (gazing).

Kaya sthairyam

Kaya sthairyam, psychic body stillness, is a particularly easy and important meditation and a preparation for other meditations. It brings tremendous benefits to a child's self-control, calmness and confidence, self-awareness, and concentration.

After settling them down, we can tell the children that we are going to time them to see just how long each one is able to sit without even the tiniest movement. Ask them to pretend that they are a statue so that no one would know that they are a real person and not a statue. After just a few sessions of *kaya sthairyam*, the benefits will be seen.

First prepare for sitting with a few practices from *pawanmuktasana* part one (see *Yoga Education for Children, Volume One*), such as ankle rotations, half and full butterfly, shoulder rotations and neck movements.

Then help them to choose an ideal meditation asana such as *siddhasana* (accomplished pose), *siddha yoni asana* (accomplished pose for women), *padmasana* (lotus pose), *ardha padmasana* (half lotus pose), *swastikasana* (auspicious

pose) or vajrasana (diamond pose). These could be experimented with in previous classes. They could sit on a little rug or blanket with the help of a cushion (only if necessary), in rows facing the front and not touching each other. If sitting on the floor is impossible in the prevailing situation, they could sit in their own classroom chairs.

Give a good pause after each instruction, watching to see when it is appropriate for the next instruction. Continue instructions as long as the children can sit still, starting with one minute and gradually increasing the time.

Step 1: Sit comfortably on the floor in a cross-legged position or in your chair.

There should be no talking or touching anyone else during this practice.

Put your hands on your knees or in your lap with thumb and first finger touching.

Close your eyes (and ignore anyone moving beside you).

Stretch your back upwards, head in normal position.

Relax your shoulders and bend your arms a little so that they are loose.

Step 2: (if appropriate) We will chant *Om* together three times.

Feel as if your 'om' is merging with everyone else's 'om' and merging with the cosmic 'om'. Take a deep breath in now: *Om, Om, Om*. Feel the vibrations of the 'om'.

Step 3: Feel your body very still and comfortable.

Imagine that you are sitting in the middle of a forest under a huge tree with many other children.

Everyone is *very* still.

You can hear the birds of the forest.

You can smell the wild flowers and moss and earth.

Pretend that your body is a stone statue or an ancient tree (use other images at other times), *very* still.

You can feel the stillness of the ground under your body as if your body is part of the ground.

Play a little game with yourself and see how still you can be, without even moving a tiny bit.

Notice how you feel right now.

For beginners, go to Step 6. For others, continue as below.

Step 4: Enjoy that stillness.

Go deep within your stillness.

Search for the deepest part of your self.

Explore that deepest part of yourself, what is it like?

Experience your deepest part. Is it a light, a sound, a feeling?

Step 5: Now think of all the good things in your life (discussion on this may need to be done beforehand) and mentally say, “Thank you” to the universe for all the good things in life. Then think of your parents, your friends, the other people you love, the people you know, see them in your mind. Mentally send them your good wishes, appreciation and love, and let them be blessed.

Step 6: Notice how you feel right now.

Feel the shape and position of your body once again.

Feel the space around you and know that you are sitting in this room right now.

Hear the sounds happening around us.

Step 7: We shall finish off (if appropriate) by chanting ‘om’ three times together; take a deep breath in now. *Om, Om, Om.* (alternately: take three deep breaths in and out and bring your mind back to the outside world.)

Finish off with palming: rubbing the hands together until they’re hot, cupping the centre of your palms over your eyes, breathe in the warmth and energy into your eyes, refreshing them. When you open your eyes, have a big smile on your face and give it to the people sitting beside you.

This is a very good way to settle the children before starting the yoga class or any class. It is also good at the end of the yoga class to get them to sit for one minute, then gradually increase the time accordingly from five to ten minutes, depending on age and experience. Even after a normal school class or homework session, sitting still with eyes closed helps to consolidate anything that has been done in the class or during the day (if done in the evening before bed). We can tell the children to sit still with God (if

appropriate) or with themselves like this for a few minutes each night, before going to bed.

For older children, you can ask them to then watch their breath for a few minutes and to empty their mind of all the day's happenings with each outgoing breath; to fill their minds with happiness and love with each inflowing breath.

Trataka

Trataka, relaxed gazing, is another practice which is excellent for children especially as it stimulates/activates the pituitary gland in the centre of the head (the third eye), harmonizing endocrinal and glandular development and thereby both making adolescence an easier transition as well as keeping the intuitive faculties alive. Trataka can be developed in easy stages.

Stage 1 Preparation: Make square cards with coloured dots in the centre, approximately nine square inches (twenty square centimetres), with a coloured dot of approximately one inch (three centimetres) in diameter in the centre.

Cards can be:

- i) white with bright coloured dots (red, green, blue, orange, purple, pink)
- ii) coloured cards with white dots
- iii) coloured cards with the complementary colour dot on the cards.

Practice: Two to four children (or adults) sit in a meditation posture around each card, about one arm's distance from the card centre (full chart sized ones can be prepared for whole class practice). Settle down into a still meditation posture with eyes closed.

Open the eyes and gaze at the centre of the dot, keeping the eyes relaxed and very, very still.

Notice the colours, size and shapes, keeping the eyes very still and relaxed. (20–60 seconds)

Close the eyes and look for the after-image, noticing the colours, shapes and size.

Keep watching till the after-image fades away. (20–60 seconds)

Finish off with palming.

Open the eyes and discuss with your neighbours what you saw with your eyes open and closed.

Repeat the above steps once or twice after changing the cards so that they see what happens with different colours against different backgrounds.

Repeat the above with the other two types of cards. The cards can all be mixed in the first stage or three different stages. Participants should have the opportunity to compare the effects of type i), ii), and iii) cards.

Stage 2: (for younger children) The same as above with simple coloured shapes, e.g. flower, geometric shape, vase, face, house, flame, yantras, words, etc.

Stage 3: (for older children) *Preparation:* Set up the participants in the same way, using a calendar or similar pictures.

Practice: a) Gently open your eyes and look very carefully at the whole picture, noticing all the details, colours and shapes. You can move your eyes around the whole picture. (20–60 seconds)

b) Close your eyes and re-create the same picture behind your closed eyes (in your *chidakasha*) with all the details. Keep it as long as possible. (20–60 seconds)

Open your eyes and look at the picture, again noticing especially what you left out of your ‘inner’ picture. (20–60 seconds)

Repeat a) and b) two more times, total three rounds, until the ‘inner’ picture is as clear as possible.

This is especially good for developing a ‘photographic’ memory and can also be done for studying, spelling words, lists, summaries, equations, diagrams, mind maps or whatever you want to remember and learn for exams.

It can be done on the picture/photo of a loved one, chosen deity, or guru, to awaken love and the *anahata chakra*, centre of energy for love, compassion and devotion, located at the centre of the chest.

Trataka can also be done as above:

- on a brightly coloured flower
- on various pictures.

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Asana and Pranayama

*Compiled by Rishi Arundhati Saraswati
Illustrated by Kathryn Gastmeier*

ASANA

Introduction

On a pure spot he shall set for himself a firm seat, neither over-high nor over-low, made of kusha grass, with, above it, a deer skin and a cloth. On this couch he shall seat himself, with thought intent, and the workings of the mind and senses brought into control; he shall practise yoga, to purify his inner faculties. Firm, holding body, head and neck in unmoving equipoise, gazing at the end of his nose, and looking not around about him, his soul at peace, void of fear, abiding in the vow of chastity, careful, with mind restrained and thought set on me, so given over to me.

—Lord Krishna, *Bhagavad Gita*, 6:11–14

Asanas, or postures, are a physical help for concentration. They are often associated with gymnastics, keeping fit or body building techniques, but this is completely wrong. Asanas bring about physiological changes within the body so they should be practised with care and not as gymnastic exercises.

Asana means a state of being in which you can remain steady, calm, quiet and comfortable with your physical body and mind totally aware. In the classical yoga text by Sage Patanjali called *Raja Yoga Sutras* or *Ashtanga Yoga*, *yogasana*

is clearly defined: *Sthiram sukham asanam* or 'asana is that position which is comfortable and steady'.

In other classical yoga texts, such as *Gheranda Samhita* or *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, many asanas are described for curative or preventative health reasons. The gentle stretching of the muscles, massaging of internal organs, toning of nerves and increase in glandular secretions throughout the body assures the physical wellbeing of the practitioner.

History

Yogasanas are mentioned in the oldest known literature of mankind, the Vedas, but it is believed by some that the science of yoga is older than the Vedas.

In archaeological excavations made at Harappa and Mohanjodaro, which is now Pakistan, many statues found depict Lord Shiva and Parvati (his spiritual wife), in different yogasanas. These civilizations were from the pre-vedic age, before the Aryan civilization in the Indus subcontinent.

According to ancient Indian legends and scriptures, Lord Shiva created all the 84,000 asanas and taught them to his first disciple, Parvati, for maintaining human health and attaining a higher degree of self-knowledge.

Throughout the centuries, these asanas have been modified and reduced in number by the great rishis and yogis, so that now only a few hundred are known. Of these postures, eighty-four are discussed in detail and only about thirty are commonly taught and practised as being useful to modern man.

The first historically recorded exponent of yogasana was the great yogi Gorakhnath. During his time the science of yoga was not popular so he taught the asanas to his close disciples, far away from society in the mountains and forests, where they led a life of seclusion and austerity. Animals were the great teachers of these yogis because the animals lived a natural life, free from disease and worldly problems. Animals do not have doctors or drugs to cure their ailments. Nature is their only helper. Through meticulous observation and

imitation of these animals, yogis developed many techniques which are natural and effective systems for curing disease. Children from about the age of eight were given the practices of surya namaskara (salute to the sun), nadi shodhana pranayama (alternate nostril breathing) and Gayatri mantra (an invocation for light and brilliance).

Yogasanas are performed slowly, with relaxation and concentration. In this way, both the external and internal systems are influenced, so that the nervous system, endocrine glands and internal organs as well as the muscles are encouraged to function properly. Asanas have physical and psychosomatic effects which are very helpful in curing infirmities. They can be done by both healthy and unhealthy people, young and old. They are also most useful for concentration and meditation. Other systems of physical culture actually increase the toxins in the body, whereas yogasanas reduce the toxin level.

General benefits

Physically, the important endocrinal system is controlled and regulated so that the correct quantities of the different hormones are secreted from all the glands in the body. This has repercussions on our physical wellbeing as well as on our mental attitude towards life. Even if one gland is malfunctioning, a noticeable loss in health can be experienced. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that this system is maintained at the peak of condition. Diseased organs can be repaired and rejuvenated and encouraged to carry out their normal duty. The muscles, bones, nervous system, glandular system, respiratory, excretory and circulatory systems are coordinated so that they help one another rather than oppose each other.

Asanas make the body flexible and able to adjust itself easily to changes of environment. The digestive functions are stimulated, so the correct amount of digestive juices flow. The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are brought into a state of balance, so that the internal organs under

their control are neither too active nor under active. Asanas maintain the physical body in its optimum condition and encourage an unhealthy body to become healthy.

Mentally, asanas make the mind strong and able to endure pain and unhappiness. The powers of determination and concentration are developed. Equilibrium and vitality become the normal state of mind after regular practice of asana. You will be able to face the sorrow, anxieties and problems of the world with peace and without being disturbed. Stability of mind is developed, life becomes easy and difficulties become stepping-stones to perfect mental health. The practice of asana releases the dormant potentialities, so that a person is able to radiate confidence and inspire others by speech, behaviour and actions.

Classification of asana

Yogasanas are classified according to either stages of difficulty of performance or dynamic/static practices. The three main stages are: beginners group, middle group and advanced.

Dynamic practices are the asanas which involve dynamic movements of the body. These are really exercises, though we will refer to them in this book as asanas, although the very meaning of the word *asana* is 'steady pose'. These practices are not intended to develop muscles, but to loosen up the body and remove stagnant blood from different parts of the body. They help tighten the skin and muscles, strengthen the lungs and encourage movement in the digestive and excretory systems. They are particularly useful for beginners.

Dynamic practices include sequences such as surya namaskara, pawanmuktasana series, dynamic paschimottan-asana and shashank bhujangasana.

Static practices are performed with little or no movement of the body, often remaining in one position for a few minutes or more. They are intended to gently massage the internal organs, glands and muscles, as well as to relax the nerves throughout the body. They are specifically concerned with bringing tranquillity to the mind and feelings of calmness.

General advice and precautions for asana practice

Before beginning the practice of asana, certain precautions must be taken:

Time: Asanas may be practised at any time of the day, except after meals. However, the best time to do them and all yoga practices is in the early morning, at the beginning of the day. In the classroom they can be used at any time of the day as long as the children have had time to digest any food.

Empty: Take care of the ‘three Bs’, the belly, bowels and bladder; they should be empty before starting yoga practice. Allow at least two hours between eating and yoga practice.

Clothing: During the practice of asanas, it is better to wear loose, comfortable and light clothing. Before practice remove spectacles, watches and any body ornaments.

Place of practice: The place of practice should be a clean, well-ventilated room which is quiet and insect free. If possible, practise outdoors in a garden or pleasant surroundings, but only if the air is free of pollutants and there is no strong wind or cold air. Make sure that there is enough space to carry out the practices – free from furniture. Most accidents occur when you fall against an object rather than falling from an asana.

Yoga mat: A folded blanket laid on a level floor, or a small carpet are recommended for practice rather than foam rubber or air mattresses.

Sequence: Asanas should be practised first, then pranayama (breath awareness), ending with relaxation, visualization or meditation.

Daily practice: It is not necessary to practise all thirty or eighty-four known asanas. There should always be a balance in the asanas chosen, making sure that the glandular stimulation received by the postures is well balanced. When determining the asanas for a class or one’s own daily practice, there are six main elements that should be included in one’s choice of asana.

1. A forward bending asana to keep the spine supple in the forward direction.

2. A backward bending asana.
3. A twisting asana for keeping the lateral movements of the spine supple.
4. A side to side asana for keeping the spine moving in those directions.
5. A balancing asana. This is a very important element that should not be left out. Many doctors, especially those working with geriatrics, now suggest that balancing exercises should be practised daily.
6. An inverted asana for stimulation of the glands in the head and reversing the pressure of blood flowing to lower extremities.
7. A sitting asana, for developing the ability to sit for some time without moving the body in order to practise pranayama and meditation.

Advice for adolescent females

Many prominent teachers of yoga suggest that asanas should be avoided during the menstrual period, or stopped a day before the period sets in and then resumed two days after the period is over. In this case, the only posture recommended for practice during menstruation is shavasana.

However, it is also stated that, other than the usual precaution of avoiding strain, there is no reason to abandon yoga practice. Many practitioners find that vajrasana, shashankasana, majari-asana and abdominal breathing in shavasana are very good postures to practise during menstruation and can help to relieve cramping. If menstrual

flow is excessive, asanas such as paschimottanasana and utthanasana may also be performed with beneficial effects.

The practice of sirshasana (headstand pose) and other inverted asanas, such as sarvangasana and vipareeta karani mudra, is not advisable, as the menstrual blood may flow backward through the fallopian tubes into the stomach linings and cause internal abdominal irritation.



PAWANMUKTASANA 1: ANTI RHEUMATIC EXERCISES

Exercises for increasing joint mobility and developing body awareness in children.



Prarambhik Sthiti (basic pose)

Sit with the legs outstretched. Place the palms of the hands on the floor to the sides and just behind the buttocks. The back, neck and head should be straight. Straighten the elbows. Lean back slightly, supported by the arms. Close the eyes and relax the whole body in this position. Alternatively, place the palms of the hands on the top of the thighs.



Padanguli Naman (toe bends)

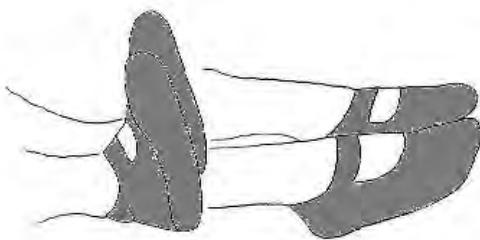
Sit in the base position with the legs outstretched and the feet slightly apart. Place the hands beside and slightly behind the buttocks, then lean back slightly, using the arms to support the back. Keep the spine as straight as possible. Be aware of the toes. Move the toes of both feet slowly backward and forward, keeping the feet upright and the ankles relaxed and motionless. Hold each position for

a few seconds. Inhale as you move the toes backward and exhale as you move the toes forward. Repeat 10 times.



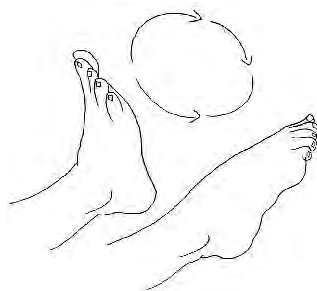
Padanguli Sprashad (spreading toes)

Sit in the base position and be aware of the toes. Spread the toes of both feet as wide apart as possible, then relax them. If there is difficulty in spreading the toes, then bend the right knee and bring the right foot close to the buttocks. Take the toes on the right foot with the hands and spread them apart and relax them. Repeat the same with the left toes. Repeat each movement 10 times.



Goolf Naman (ankle bends)

Remain in the base position. Keep the feet slightly apart. Slowly flex the ankles moving both feet backward and then point the toes, moving the feet forward, bending them from the ankle joint. Try to stretch the feet forward to touch the floor and then draw them back towards the knees. Hold each position for a few seconds. Repeat the movement 10 times. Inhale while flexing the ankles and exhale while pointing the toes.



Golf Chakra (ankle rotation)

Remain in the base position. Separate the legs slightly, keeping them straight. Keep the heels on the ground throughout the practice. Rotate the right foot clockwise from the ankle 10 times and then repeat 10 times in an anti-clockwise direction. Repeat the same with the left foot. Repeat the same with both feet together in the same direction, 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise. It can be repeated 10 times in the clockwise/anti-clockwise directions but with the feet moving in opposite directions. Inhale on the upward and exhale on the downward movement.



Submarine Pose Variation (when used together with mani-bandha chakra)

Sitting in the base position raise the arms straight out in front of the body at about chest level. Try to keep the awareness at the ankles and wrists. Slowly rotate both hands, with the fingers outstretched rather than in a fist,

and both feet moving them together in the same direction. Rotate at least 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

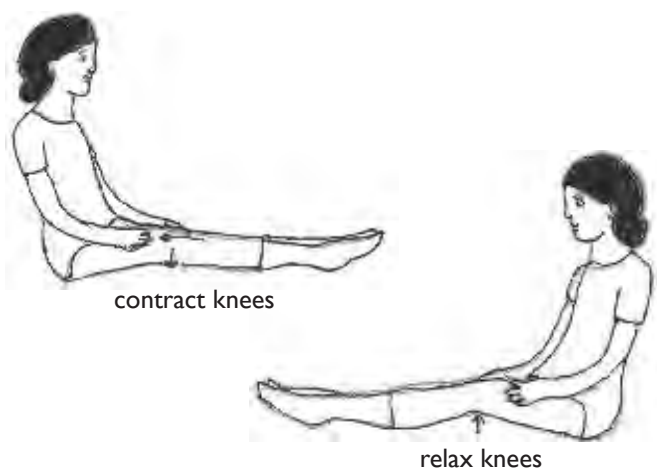
Variation: Rotate the right hand and foot 10 times in a clockwise direction, making the movement as wide as possible to turn the submarine around to the right. Rotate the right hand and foot 10 times anti-clockwise to get the submarine going back in the forward direction. Do the same practice with the left foot. The legs and body should remain relaxed with only movement in the ankles.



Golf Ghoornan (ankle crank)

Sit in the base position. Bend the left knee and bring the foot towards the buttock. Turn the knee out to the side and place the foot on the right thigh. Make sure the ankle is far enough over the thigh to be free for rotation. Place the left hand on the left knee and hold the toes of the left foot with the right hand. With the aid of the right hand, slowly rotate the left foot 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise. Repeat with the right foot placed on the left thigh. Inhale on the upward movement and exhale on the downward movement.

Benefits: All the foot and calf asanas help in returning the stagnant lymph and venous blood. They thus relieve tiredness and cramps and prevent venous thrombosis. They help children to become aware of the joints in different parts of the feet and legs and keeping them supple.



Janu Sankujanasana (knee contractions)

Sit in the base position with the hands resting lightly on the upper part of knees. Be aware of the legs and especially be aware of the knees. Contract the upper thigh muscles, which pull the knees downward, so the back of the knees touch the floor or mat and the knee caps move upward slightly. Pause for 10 seconds then relax the thigh muscles, letting the knee caps return to their normal position and the back of knees to relax from the floor. Repeat at least 10 times.

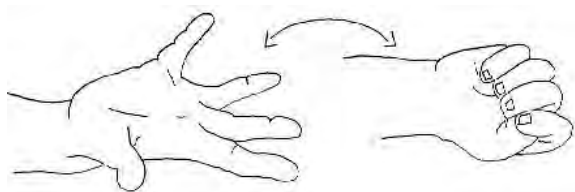
Benefits: This exercise is ideal for keeping the knees healthy and flexible. It strengthens the muscles in the upper thighs and helps to relieve tensions in the legs. It is an ideal practice for those with sore or problematic knees.

Janu Naman (knee bends)

Sitting in the base position, bend the right knee and clasp the hands under the right thigh. Using the leg muscles then the hands, bring the knee up as close to the chest as possible and the heel close to the buttock. Keep the spine and head straight. Then slowly straighten the leg, bringing the heel close to but not touching the floor. Repeat this movement 10 times, then do the same with the left leg.



Exhale while bending the knee to the chest and inhale as the leg is straightened.

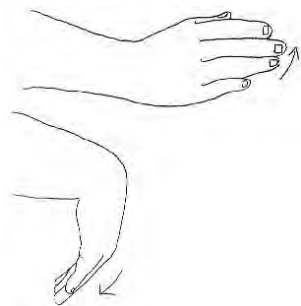


Mushtika Bandhana (hand clenching)

In the base position or in sukhāsana, the easy pose, hold both arms straight in front of the body at shoulder level. Open the hands and stretch the fingers as wide apart as possible. Then close the fingers, thumbs inside to make a fist, wrapping the fingers slowly around the thumb. Repeat each movement, stretching the fingers wide and making a fist around the thumb 10 times. Inhale while opening the hands and exhale while making the fist.

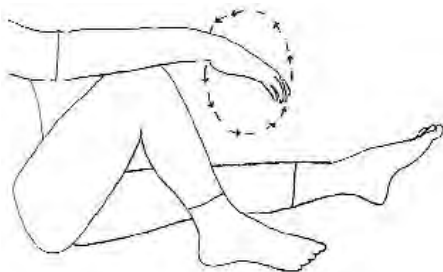
Manibandha Naman (wrist bends)

From the base position or easy pose, stretch the arms out in front of the body at shoulder level. Keep the hands open and the fingers straight throughout the practice. Bend the hands backwards at the wrists as if pressing the palms against a wall, fingers pointing towards the ceiling.



Then bend the hands forward from the wrists so that the fingers point towards the floor. Keep the elbows straight throughout the practice, but keep the arms relaxed. Repeat these movements 10 times in each direction. Inhale while bending the wrists backward and exhale as the wrists are bent forward.

This practice can be done starting with bending the right wrist backward and the left wrist forward, trying to synchronize the movements so that the hands pass each other when the fingers are pointed straight out from the body. This should be done slowly and demands more attention to keep the movements synchronized. This helps to develop concentration.



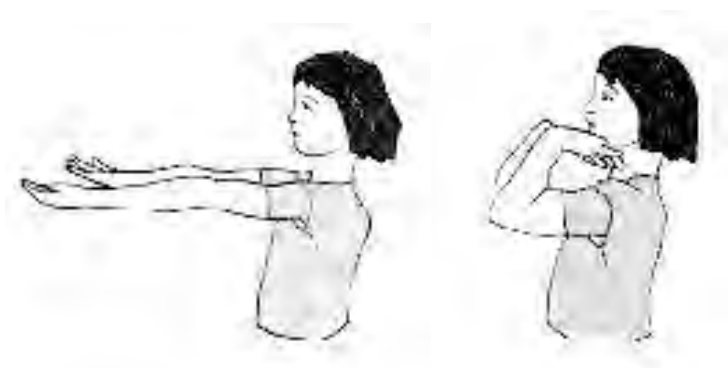
Manibandha Chakra (wrist joint rotation)

From the base position, or easy pose, raise the right arm forward at shoulder level. Fingers may be in a fist or kept straight as each movement uses the muscles in a different way. The left hand may be used as a support and

the right knee bent so that the arm can rest on the right knee to keep from rotating the arm instead of the wrist joint. Slowly rotate the hand, ensuring that the palm of the hand remains downward or forward throughout the rotation. The arms and elbows should remain straight and still. Awareness is placed at the wrist joint while making as large a circle as possible with the wrists. Rotate the wrist 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise, then repeat the same movements with the left hand. If the fingers are kept straight, the children can imagine the fingers like the second hand of the clock that moves slowly from twelve to one, to two, etc. This helps to keep the awareness focused on the hand and wrist.

Raise both arms and repeat the 10 clockwise and anti-clockwise movements using both hands together, circling in the same direction. It can be repeated 10 times moving the hands in opposite directions.

Benefits: The hand and wrist asanas are beneficial for arthritis of the related joints. They also relieve tension caused by prolonged writing, typing and so on.



Kehuni Naman (elbow bends)

From the base position, or easy pose, raise the arms out in front of the body at shoulder level. Hands are open with the palms facing upward. Bend the arms at the elbows and touch the fingers to the shoulders, then straighten them again. Repeat these movements 10 times.



Then bring the arms outstretched at shoulder level out to the side of the body and repeat the movements for the elbows 10 times each.



Then bring the fingertips to the shoulders once again and straighten the arms upward, trying to bring the palms together above the head, then bending the elbows again bring the fingers to rest on the shoulders. Repeat these movements 10 times each. Inhale while straightening the arms and exhale while bending the arms.

Benefits: These movements help to keep mobility in the elbows and the direction of the arms exercises different back muscles. The upward stretching movement of the arms helps to stretch and straighten the spine and is easily done while sitting at a desk for relieving rounded back.

Skandha Chakra (shoulder socket rotation)

While sitting in the base position, or easy pose, bend the right elbow and place the fingers of the right hand on the right shoulder. Let the left hand remain resting on

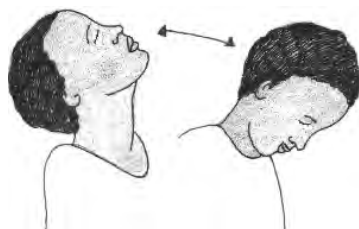


the left knee and keep the back straight. Bring the right elbow across in front of the chest as far as possible, then raise the elbow up and rotate it up, around and down in as large a circle as possible. Repeat 10 times, then start the movement by bringing the elbow up the back, rotating it around and down in front of the body again, making the circle as large as possible 10 times. Repeat the same movements with the left shoulder joints.



Then place the fingertips of both hands on the shoulders and begin the movements by bringing the elbows together in front of the body, raising them up and rotating out and backward, making as large a circle as possible. After 10 backward rotations, repeat the opposite movements 10 times, starting up the back, then bringing the elbows together in front of the body and down. Inhale on the upward movement of the elbows and exhale on the downward movements.

Benefits: The shoulder movements relieve the strain of sitting at a desk or in front of a computer and are helpful in cervical spondylitis and frozen shoulder. They also maintain flexibility of the shoulders and help to open the chest for healthy lung development.



Greeva Sanchalana (neck movements)

Forward and back: From the base position, or easy pose, with the hands resting on the knees, close the eyes. Slowly bring the chin forward towards the chest as far as possible, then slowly raise the chin as high as possible, trying to touch the back of the head against the shoulders if possible. Exhale while bringing chin to chest and inhale as the chin is raised as high as possible 10 times in each direction.



Right and left: From the base position, or easy pose, with the hands resting on the knees, close the eyes. Slowly bring the chin around to the right shoulder as far as possible, then slowly bring the chin back toward the front and slowly over to the left shoulder. Try to align the chin and shoulders if possible and be aware of the release of tensions in the neck muscles. Exhale while turning the chin to the shoulder and inhale as the chin is brought back to the front.



Side to side: Sit in the easy pose with the hands resting on the knees. Straighten the elbows so that the shoulders are raised slightly. Then bend the neck sideways, bring the right ear to the right shoulder while exhaling. Inhale as the head is straightened. Exhale and bring the left ear to the left shoulder and inhale while straightening the head again. Repeat to each side 10 times. The raised shoulders are then lowered by bending the elbows. In the beginning, one can lower the raised shoulders after 5 times, then relax them and raise them again for the next 5 times.



Rotation: Sitting in the easy pose with the hands resting on the knees, straighten the elbows so that the shoulders are raised slightly. Then bring the chin down to the chest and start the rotation movement by bringing the right ear to touch the right shoulder. Letting the head roll across the shoulder at the back, bring the left ear to the left shoulder, then bring the chin back down to the chest. Relax the

shoulder down by bending the elbows, then straighten them again for the opposite rotation. Chin to chest, left ear to left shoulder, rolling the head against the raised shoulder across the back so the right ear rests on the right shoulder and then completing the rotation by bringing the chin back down to the chest.

Raising of the shoulder for the last two movements, the side to side and rotation allows for complete stretching of the muscles and movement of the vertebrae in the neck without any strain. This is especially important for seniors. All these movements should be done with great awareness and as slowly as possible with as much relaxation to the area as possible.

Contra-indications: These movements should not be done by persons suffering from high or low blood pressure and those with extreme cervical spondylitis should strictly avoid forward bending of the neck.

Benefits: All the nerves connecting the different organs and limbs of the body pass through the neck. Therefore, the muscles of the neck and shoulders accumulate tensions especially after prolonged work at a desk. These movements release tension, heaviness and stiffness in the head, neck and shoulder region.

Eye exercises

The following exercises can remove and prevent most eye diseases, both muscular and optical, if they are practised with patience and perseverance. Many people who have done these exercises over a long period of time have discarded their spectacles. Aldous Huxley was one such person.

After each of the exercises the eyes should be closed and rested for at least half a minute. The more often the exercises are done the better. However, if there is lack of time in the daily program, then the whole series performed once in the morning and once in the evening will suffice. If this is the case, there is extra reason to do the exercises with maximum possible dedication and awareness.



Side to side viewing

Assume sukhasana, the easy pose, and hold the arms straight out to the sides at shoulder level with the thumbs pointing upwards. Without moving the head sideways, focus the eyes on the following, one after the other: left thumb, space between the eyebrows (bhrumadhya), right thumb, space between the eyebrows. Repeat this cycle 15 to 20 times and then rest.



Diagonal viewing

Maintain the same position, sukhasana (easy pose), but place the right fist on the right knee so that the thumb points upwards. Hold the left thumb to the left of the body, slightly above shoulder level. Without moving the head, focus the eyes first on the left thumb, then on the right thumb and then return to the left thumb and repeat. Repeat this process 15 to 20 times, then rest and close the eyes. Repeat the same procedure with the left fist resting on left knee and right hand extended to right side just above shoulder level.



Up and down viewing

Maintain the same position and place both fists on the knees, with thumbs pointing upwards. Keeping the arms straight and the head motionless, slowly raise the left thumb, while following the motion of the thumb with the eyes. On reaching the highest elevation, slowly return to the starting position, all the time keeping the eyes focused on the thumb. Practise the same movement with the right hand. Repeat 5 times with each thumb. Finally close the eyes and rest.



Distant and near viewing

Maintain the same body position as before, relaxing the hand on the knees. Raise the right arm straight out in front of the body with the thumb up. Focus the eyes on the nose tip, then on the thumb, then on a distant object. Focus on the thumb again, then on the nose again. Repeat this process as many times as possible. Afterwards close the eyes and relax them.



Rotational viewing

Sit comfortably. Begin with the right fist, thumb upright held as far down towards the lap as is possible so it can still be seen without moving the head. Keep the arm straight and fix your gaze on the thumb. Keeping the head straight, move your right arm in a large circular movement to the right, upwards, then down to the left, and back to where it started. Follow this movement with the eyes only, do not move the head. Perform the movement 5 times clockwise and 5 times anti-clockwise with the left arm and thumb being followed. This can be coordinated with the breath, breathing in as the arm is raised upwards and breathing out as the arm comes down to the starting position.

Benefits: These exercises relax tension and restore balance in the muscles in and surrounding the eyes and improve coordinated activities of both eyeballs.



Palming the eyes

Sit quietly and close the eyes. Rub the hands together vigorously so that they become hot. Place the hands over

the eyelids without pressure. Feel the heat soaking into the eyes and eye muscles and the eyes becoming relaxed and warm. Open the eyes and gaze at the palms of your hands. Then remove the hands slowly, keeping the eyes open.

Benefits: This rejuvenates and revitalizes the eye muscles and stimulates the circulation of the aqueous humor, the liquid that runs between the cornea and the lens of the eye, aiding the correction of defective vision.

ASANAS



Ardha Chandrasana (half moon pose)

A

Sit in vajrasana (diamond pose) and then kneel with the legs together and arms by the sides. Inhale as you step forward with the left foot. Bend forward and place the hands by the sides of the left foot, palms flat on the floor. Bring the palms of the hands together and slowly take them up over the head stretching back, following the arching line of the back and leg on through to the fingertips. Exhale while returning the hands back down by the side, relaxing the arch and bringing the left knee back beside the right one. Repeat the same sequence with the right leg. Practise on each side at least 5 times.

An easier version of this asana can be done without stretching the arms over the head, but letting the hands rest on the front knee.

Benefits: This asana limbers and strengthens the entire skeletal structure. It develops balance and so aids in concentration.



Ardha Matsyendrasana (spinal twisting pose)

Basic: Sit in the basic pose with legs outstretched in front of the body, leaning slightly on the hands on the floor behind the torso. Bring the sole of the right foot to the floor on the outside of the left knee. Bring the left arm forward and place the outside of the upper left arm against the outside of the right thigh, then reach for the right foot with the left hand. Turn the head as far to the right as possible. Try to relax and hold the position for as long as is comfortable, then bring the head back towards the front, the hands to the floor behind the torso and straighten the leg into the basic pose again. Repeat the same movements for the opposite side, bringing the sole of the left foot to the floor outside the right knee.

Advanced: Sit in the basic pose with legs outstretched in front of the body, leaning slightly on the hands on the floor behind the torso. Raise the right knee slightly off the floor and thread the left foot underneath, bringing the sole of the left foot close to the right side of the buttocks. Bring the sole of the right foot to the floor on the outside of the left knee, with the outer side of the left arm placed against the outer side of the right leg and reach for the right foot with the left hand. Turn the head to the right as far as possible



and hold the position for as long as is comfortable. Then bring the head back towards the front, the hands to the floor behind the torso and straighten the legs into the basic pose again. Repeat the same movements for the other side of the body, bringing the left leg up this time.



Pharaoh in Audience Pose Variation

Sit in the basic pose, with legs outstretched in front of the body, leaning slightly on the hands on the floor behind the torso. Bend the right knee and bring the sole of the right foot close to the left thigh. Bend the left knee and place the left foot outside the right thigh, keeping the foot flat on the floor. Then bring the right elbow and place it on the left knee placing the fist under the chin. This is the

pharaoh sitting in audience. Repeat the same to the other side. Left knee down and right knee up, etc.



Pharaoh Surveying his Kingdom Variation

Same as above, then bring the right hand, palm down, to the eyebrows as if to shade out the sun, then twist the upper body, head and hand to the left and right. This is the pharaoh surveying his kingdom. Repeat these same exercises in reverse. Left knee is down and right knee up and left hand is palm downward at the eyebrows as if shading the eyes.

Benefits: Tones the spinal nerves, makes the back muscles supple and loosens the vertebrae. Massages the abdominal organs, thereby helping to remove digestive ailments. Activates the pancreas and is therefore highly recommended for diabetes. Helps to relieve lumbago and muscular rheumatism and helps to make the hip joints flexible. It straightens the spine and helps to correct posture and promotes lateral movement of the spinal column.

Ardha Padmasana (half lotus pose)

Sit in the base pose. Spread the feet apart as wide as is comfortable. Then fold the left leg and place the left foot beside the right thigh. Fold the right leg and place the right foot on top of the left thigh. Keep the spine, neck and head straight.



Contra-indications: This practice should not be done by anyone with sciatica and sacral ailments.

Benefits: This posture tones the coccygeal and sacral nerves by supplying them with an extra flow of blood. The normally large blood flow into the legs is reduced to the abdominal region. It stimulates the digestive process and when mastered allows the practitioner to hold the body completely steady for long periods of time. The benefits of padmasana are slightly reduced in this asana. This posture helps to bring about a state of calm in the children.

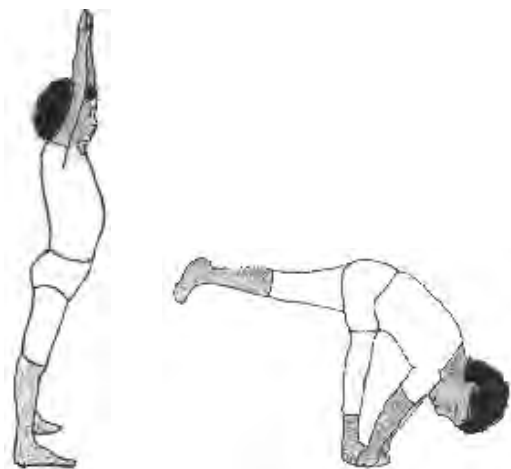


Ashwa Sanchalana (equestrian pose)

Kneel with the legs together and arms by the sides. Inhale as you step forward with the left foot. Bend forward and place the hands by the sides of the left foot, palms flat on the floor. Stretch the right leg backwards and arch the back and neck, bringing the chin up as high as possible. Pause, then exhale as you return to the kneeling position.

Repeat the same sequence with the right leg. Practise each side at least 5 times.

Benefits: This asana limbers and strengthens the entire skeletal structure. It develops balance and so aids in concentration.



B Bakasana (crane pose)

Stand erect, feet together, with fingers interlocked and arms raised above the head. Bend the body at the hips and grasp the left toes with the hands. Raise the right leg behind as high as possible. Slowly bring the forehead down towards the knee. Do not bend either knee. Hold this position as long as is comfortable. Slowly raise the head, then lower the leg and return to the erect position. Repeat the same with the left leg. Try to hold the final position for about 10 seconds on each leg in the beginning, then building up from 30 seconds to one minute and so on.

Benefits: This asana improves the blood circulation to the brain, strengthens the arms, wrists and leg muscles, relaxes the lower back and aids in the attainment of nervous coordination. The balancing improves concentration.

Bhujangasana (cobra pose)

Lie on the stomach with legs straight and the toes extended. Place the hands palms down on the floor on



either side of the chest. With full inhalation and without lifting the navel from the floor, raise the chest and head, so that the back is arched to the maximum with the chin as high as possible.

Benefits: This is especially good for children suffering from an enlarged or diseased liver. It is beneficial for toning the developing ovaries and uterus. It stimulates appetite and relieves constipation. The spine is kept supple. It is beneficial for all abdominal organs, especially liver and kidneys. It relocates slipped discs and removes all kinds of backache.



Bhramari-asana (bumblebee pose)

Stand erect with feet together. Relax the whole body and balance the bodyweight on both feet. Slowly push the buttocks backward, causing a hinging at the hip joints, keeping the head and body in line. Simultaneously, raise the right leg up behind the body, keeping it in line with the trunk. The body is rotated around the left hip joint. Raise the arms behind the back and wriggle the

fingers while holding the position. Inhale deeply and while exhaling hum like the bumblebee. Remain in the position for as long as is comfortable, then straighten the body and bring the right foot back down to the floor. Relax before repeating the same with the left leg raised behind the body.

Benefits: This standing balance posture helps to develop concentration, strengthens the legs and aids in the attainment of nervous coordination. Some doctors have found that standing balance postures are useful for children suffering from enuresis (bed wetting). This is probably due to improved nervous coordination and strengthening of the lower body.



C Chakki Chalanasana (churning the mill)

Sit with the legs outstretched in front of the body, with feet slightly apart. Interlock the fingers of both hands and stretch the arms out in front of the body. Do not bend the elbows but keep the arms straight and horizontal in front of the body throughout. Exhale and bend forward as far as possible while you circle to the right so that the hands pass above the toes as far as possible. Inhale and lean back as far as possible on the backward circle. Movement takes place at the waist, hips and abdomen as the arms are circled around from right to left as if churning a mill or stirring a pot. This movement should be repeated for 10 rounds of circling, then repeated starting the circling motion from left to right. This may also be practised with the feet wider apart.

Benefits: This posture is excellent for toning the nerves and organs of the pelvis and abdomen. It is very useful for regulating the menstrual cycle in the adolescent. It helps to tighten the abdominal muscles and reduce fat cells in the stomach area.



Chakrasana (wheel pose)

Lie in shavasana, bend the knees and bring the heels to touch the buttocks with the feet about 30 cms apart. Raise the arms, bend the elbows and place the palms of the hands just above the shoulders on the floor, fingertips towards the shoulders. Inhale, hold the breath in as you slowly raise the trunk, letting the head rotate slightly and allowing the crown to support the weight of the upper body. The knees will form right angles. Then straighten the arms and legs and lift the head off the ground as you raise the body to its fully arched height. You can straighten the knees almost completely by moving the trunk headwards. Return slowly to the head base, then the supine position while exhaling. Rest, check the breath rate and heart beat. If they are fast, then allow them to become normal before repeating the practice. Repeat about 5 times. Later, when able to hold the position, hold as long as is comfortable.

Benefits: This asana is beneficial for the entire nervous and glandular system. It influences all hormonal secretions and provides radical cures for many varied ailments of the female reproductive system. It fully stretches the back and abdominal muscles, making them supple. It powerfully compresses and massages the abdominal organs.

Children, especially those from about six onwards love this asana and usually take to it quite quickly. They call it 'the crab' and often go walking all around the room while doing this dynamic asana. It can be made more difficult and, therefore, more like a wheel by bringing the hands and feet closer together in the final pose.

Contra-indications: This posture should not be practised by sufferers of high blood pressure, coronary ailments, stomach ulcers, toxic intestines, partial deafness or dilated eye capillaries. It should also not be practised by anyone who has recently fractured bones or undergone abdominal operations. It is not to be practised until the practitioner has accustomed himself to the more preliminary backward bending poses.



D Dhanurasana (bow pose)

Lie on the stomach, bend the knees and hold the ankles with the hands. Head, chest and thighs are raised as far as possible so that the body resembles a bow and the lower legs and arms the bowstring. Expand the chest and stretch the body by pulling on the ankles as you pull the feet away from the body. The body will now rest on the abdomen with the arms straight.

Benefits: This posture is excellent for massaging the abdominal muscles and organs. It is beneficial to those suffering from gastro-intestinal diseases and is effective in cases of chronic constipation and sluggishness of the liver. The spinal cord is kept supple.

Dwikonasana (two angle pose)

Stand erect with the feet about one foot apart. Bend forward at the hip joints so that the body is at a ninety degree angle with the legs, facing forward. Extend the arms behind the back and interlock the fingers. While bending forward, raise the arms behind the back as high as possible without strain. The arms act as a lever and accentuate the stretch given to the shoulders and chest. Look forward as far as possible, so that the face is parallel with the floor. Remain in the final position for a short time then return to the upright position, relaxing the arms. Repeat up to 5 times. Inhale while standing erect and returning upright. Exhale while bending forward.



Reindeer Pose Variation

Stand with the feet about one foot apart. Bend forward at the hip joints so that the body is at a ninety degree angle with the legs, facing forward. Raise the arms behind the back and spread the fingers wide so they look like the antlers on the reindeer.

Benefits: This posture strengthens the intraspinal muscles between the upper spine and the shoulder blades and develops the chest and neck. It is especially good for young, growing bodies since it develops balance and concentration and helps improve posture.

Contra-indications: In acute and painful conditions of the shoulder joints this asana should be avoided.



E

Eka Pada Pranamasana (one-legged salutation)



Stand erect with the feet together and arms at the sides. Fix the eyes on a point straight ahead. Raise one foot and place the sole against the inside of the opposite upper thigh. Raise the hands and place the palms together in front of the chest, in pranam mudra. Practise as long and as much as possible. Then practise the same with the opposite leg.



Date Palm Tree Variation

After attaining the final position, bring the hands up, outstretched above the head, then spread the arms wide, spreading the fingers so that the arms are like the branches and the fingers the leaves of the tree.

Benefits: This asana develops equilibrium, balance and concentration. It strengthens the legs, ankles and muscles of the feet.

G

Garudasana (eagle pose)

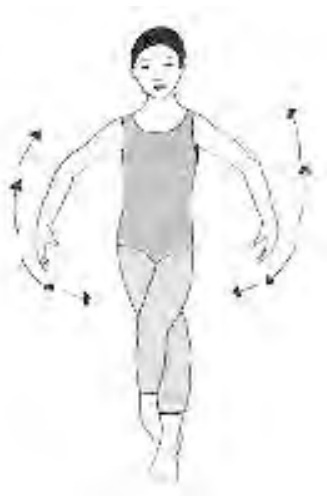
From a standing position, fix the eyes on a point straight ahead. Raise the left leg and twist it around the right leg, the left thigh being placed in front of the right thigh and



the left foot coming around the back to rest on the calf of the right leg. Maintain this position while interlacing the arms, by crossing the right elbow over the left, and bring the palms together. Now bend the right knee and lower the body until the left toes touch the floor. Hold this final position for as long as possible. Raise the body and release the arms and legs and relax the body and have a good deep breath. Repeat using the other side of the body, this time balancing on the left leg.

Flying Eagle Variation

From a standing position, assume garudasana, the eagle pose. Keeping your gaze fixed on a point, slowly begin to unwrap the arms and start to open them, bringing them to the sides at shoulder level. Keep the elbows bent so they resemble the wings. Slowly move the arms up and down a few times. Bring the arms back to centre and again interlace them. Return to a standing position and repeat on the opposite side. For a hummingbird, flutter the fingers as well.



Benefits: The bones, muscles and nerves of the legs are strengthened. It helps to develop and maintain balance and concentration. It improves posture, balance and coordination.

Gatayatmak Meru Vakrasana (dynamic spinal twist)

From the basic pose, spread the legs as wide apart as possible. Raise the arms to shoulder height out to the



sides. Keeping the legs straight, bend slightly forward and take hold of the right toes with the left hand, the right hand is still outstretched and behind the body. Turn the head and look at the right hand. Slowly return the body to the upright forward facing position and repeat the same movement to the other side. Practise 10 times to each side.

Benefits: This posture loosens the vertebrae and removes stiffness of the back. It helps in stimulating peristaltic activity in the intestines and removes constipation.

Contra-indications: Anyone with back problems should avoid this asana.



Gatyatmak Paschimottanasana (dynamic pincer pose)

Lie flat on the back with the feet together. Raise the arms over the head and bring them to the floor with the palms facing upwards and the whole body relaxed. This is the starting position. Inhale while raising the trunk to the

sitting position with the arms straight above the head and the spine straight. Exhale while bending forward into paschimottanasana in a smooth movement. While breathing normally hold the final position for a short time. Inhale and return to the sitting position with the arms outstretched above the head. Exhale while leaning backwards and return to the starting position. This completes one round. Practise up to 10 rounds.

Benefits: The benefits for this asana are the same as for paschimottanasana, although at a reduced level. This is a dynamic practice which speeds up the circulation and metabolic processes. In addition, it renders the whole body more flexible, stimulating the physical and pranic energy. It tightens the upper and lower abdominals and strengthens the upper back muscles. This asana is prescribed for those suffering from diabetes.

Greeva Sanchalana (see Pawanmuktasana 1 neck movements)

Goof Chakra (see Pawanmuktasana 1 ankle rotations)

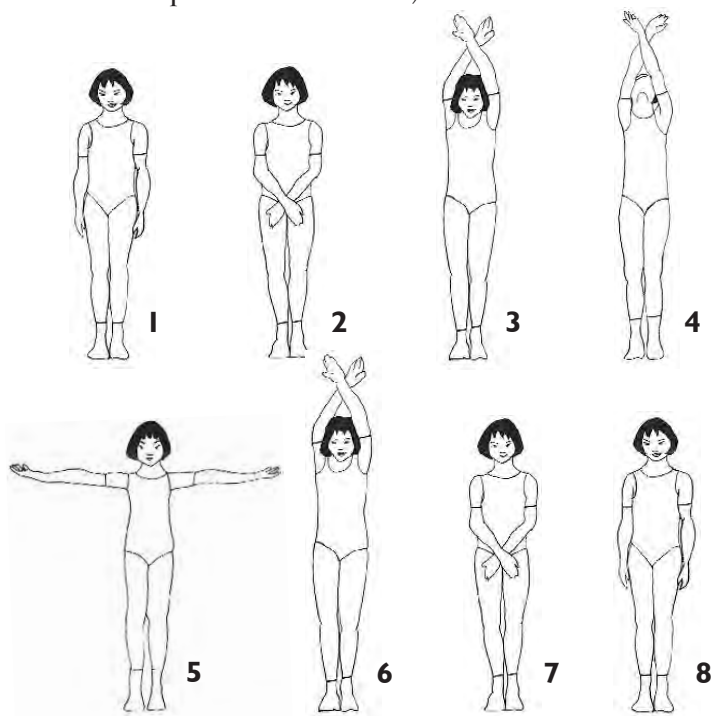


Halasana (plough pose)

Lie flat on the back. Raise both legs and guide them over the head until the toes touch the floor. The legs should remain straight. Support the back with the hands if necessary. Then try to bring the hands to the floor so that the arms look like the handles of the plough. Breathe comfortably and hold for a few seconds. Repeat 5 times.

H

Benefits: This pose is recommended for diabetics. It aids the rejuvenation of the pancreas as well as the regulation of adrenalin in the system. Daily practice is beneficial for regulating the hormones in teenage girls. If used with very young children, it should be done as a dynamic asana, not held for any length of time (as in the blossoming lotus flower for preschool children).



Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)

1. Stand with the feet together and arms resting beside the body. Relax the whole body and balance the body weight on both feet.
2. Cross the hands in front of the body.
3. Inhale deeply while slowly raising the arms above the head, keeping the hands crossed.
4. At the same time bend the head back slightly and look up at the crossed hands.

5. Exhale and spread the arms out to the sides so that they form a straight line at shoulder level.
6. Inhale and raise the arms again, crossing the hands.
7. Exhale and lower the arms with crossed hands down in front of the body. Repeat 5 to 10 times.
8. After completing 5 or 10 rounds, inhale and exhale in the starting position.

Benefits: This posture rectifies rounded shoulders and removes stiffness from the shoulders and upper back. It also influences the heart and improves blood circulation. The whole body, especially the brain, receives an extra supply of oxygen. The Hieroglyph variation is a standing, twisting balance pose so it also encourages lateral vertebrae flexibility and improves concentration.



Penguin, Emperor Penguin Pose Variation

Stand with the feet together and arms resting by the sides. Relax the whole body, balancing the weight on both feet. Turn the toes outward, keeping the heels together. Bend the wrists so that the hands and fingers are pointing away from the body. Keeping the legs straight, take a few steps forward and then a few steps back to the original place. This causes the body to waddle like the walk of the penguin.

Hieroglyph Pose Variation

Stand with the feet together side by side and arms resting beside the body. Be aware of the whole body and balance. Bring the left foot in line in front of the right foot. Raise the arms outstretched to the sides in line with the shoulders. Twist the upper body from the waist towards the left. Bend the right elbow so that the right hand and fingers are



pointing towards the floor, palm turned towards the body. Bend the left elbow and point the hand and fingers upward. Turn the head to the left to look at the left palm. Hold this final pose for as long as is comfortable. Return the upper body towards the front and again stand with the feet together. Do the same movements to the opposite side.



J Jhulana Lurhakanasana (rock and roll)

Lie flat on the back and bring the knees close to the chest and clasp the legs behind the knees, keeping the legs from the knees straight above the body. Cross the ankles. Bring the legs down with a little force and at the same time bring the trunk of the body to a sitting position, making sure that the chin is tucked in close to the chest. Roll backwards on to the back and then continue with the sitting and rolling, back and forward movements. Use the legs to get the movement going and keep the chin tucked close to the chest to avoid bumping the head. Repeat the movements 10 times.

Benefits: This posture massages the whole of the spinal cord, the back, buttocks and hips. It is most useful if done first thing in the morning after waking.

Contra-indications: This postures should not be practised by anyone with a serious back condition.

K Kati Chakrasana (standing spinal twist)

Stand erect with the feet about one and a half feet apart, arms resting at the sides. Bring the right hand to rest at



the front of the left shoulder and place the left arm behind the back, resting against the body at the waist area. Exhale and twist the body around to the left side as far as possible and while inhaling bring the body back to the original position. Then exhale and reverse the hand positions and twist the body around towards the right, then inhale while returning the body towards the front. Repeat this practice to each side 10 times.



Helicopter Pose Variation

Stand with feet about one foot apart and stretch the arms out to the sides at shoulder height. Slowly twist the upper body around to the left as far as possible. Slowly twist back around to the right side as far as possible. Twist to each side back and forth 10 times so that the arms are rotating around like the rotors on a helicopter.

Benefits: This posture tones the waist, back and hip joints. It is useful for correcting spinal stiffness and postural defects. It helps redistribute waistline fat. Maintains lateral mobility within the spinal column.

Kashtha Takshanasana (chopping wood)

Sit in the squatting position, feet flat on the floor about one and a half feet apart, or as much as necessary to get the feet flat. The knees should be fully bent and separated. Clasp the hands together on the floor between the feet, with the arms outstretched and the elbows inside the knees. Raise the arms above the head as high as possible, stretching the spine upward and looking at the raised hands. Make a downward stroke with the arms as if chopping wood as you bring the hands to the floor between the feet again and the head facing straight forward again.



Benefits: This posture loosens the pelvic girdle and tones the pelvic muscles. It has a special effect on the usually inaccessible muscles of the back between the shoulder blades, as well as the shoulder joints and upper back muscles. It strengthens the knees and encourages correct posture.



Khada Pranamasana (standing salutations)

Stand erect with the feet together, with the spine straight but relaxed. The palms of the hands are together resting against the breast bone with fingertips upward in pranam mudra. Breathe gently and hold the position while maintaining balance. Close the eyes and continue keeping balance and breathing gently. Hold steadily for one minute.



Cleopatra Pose Variation

Stand with the feet together, arms relaxed by the sides. Extend the arms to the sides at shoulder height. Bend the elbows and bring the fingertips together behind the head with the thumbs resting against the muscles running alongside the spinal column in the neck. Slowly turn the chin towards the right shoulder and then slowly back to the front, continuing on towards the left shoulder then back to the front. The thumbs and fingers are kept firm and still which provides a massage for the neck muscles. Repeat 5 times to each side.

Benefits: This is an excellent pose for helping children to develop and become aware of correct posture. This is an excellent exercise to do also in the seated position since it requires only the arms and head to move, so can be done easily at the desk. The massaging of the neck muscles relieves stress and tension in the shoulders and neck from sitting too long at the desk, computer, etc.



Makarasana (crocodile pose)

Lie on the stomach. Raise the trunk, rest the head in the palms of the hands and place the elbows on the floor. Try to bring the elbows as close together as possible. The

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closer the elbows are together the greater the arching for the spine.

Benefits: This is an easy and effective posture for those suffering from slipped disc, in which case one should remain in this position for extended lengths of time for best results, say for half an hour or longer. This posture activates intestinal peristalsis and removes wind. It is a good relaxation pose.



Mandukasana (frog pose)

Squat with the legs far enough apart to be able to have the feet flat on the floor. Place the hands palms down on the floor between the feet. Move the weight of the body up on to the toes and hop forward, repeating the hopping several times.

Benefits: This posture is particularly useful for strengthening the legs and developing balance, so aids in improving concentration. Children love this asana and love to make frog noises while hopping.



Marjari-asana (cat stretch pose)

Sit in vajrasana, then lift the buttocks and rise up on to the knees (kneeling position) while placing both palms on the floor about shoulder width apart, directly under the shoulders. The two arms and two thighs should look like the four legs of a table, so this position is also

called the table pose. While inhaling deeply, slowly arch the back downward, pressing the abdomen towards the floor and raising the chin as high up as possible. Then exhale deeply while slowly bowing the spine like that of a cat, abdomen pulled upwards with the spine and the chin tucked down to the chest. This should be repeated at least 10 times.

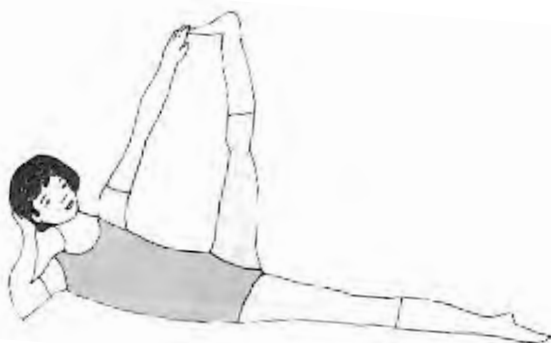
Benefits: This asana makes the neck, shoulders and spine flexible. It gently tones the female reproductive system so can be used by female students throughout life. Sufferers of menstrual irregularities and leucorrhoea will find great relief from this asana. It may also be practised at the time of menstruation for relief from menstrual cramps. The benefits are enhanced if the stomach is contracted during exhalation.



Matsyasana (fish pose)

Lie flat on the back. Use the arms as a support, lift the shoulders and arch the back so that the body is resting on the top of the head, the buttocks and outstretched legs. Bring the palms together and let them rest on the chest with the fingers pointing skyward, like the dorsal fin of a shark or fish.

Benefits: It tones the spinal column and makes the back flexible. Stimulates the nerves in the neck as well as the thyroid gland function. By stretching the intestines it helps alleviate constipation and digestive ailments. It is very good for lung ailments like asthma or bronchitis as it encourages deep respiration. To remove constipation drink three glasses of water then do this asana.



Meru Arkarshanasana (ship pose)

Lie on the right side with the right elbow resting on the floor. Lift the head and rest it in the right hand. The left hand is placed flat on the floor in front of the body to become steady. Raise the left leg as high as possible by rotating the hip joint so the toes face the body, then flex the ankle. Reach and take hold of the left toes with the left hand. Breathe gently and hold as long as is comfortable. Repeat the same on the left side.

Benefits: This posture tones the waist, back and hip joints. It is useful for correcting spinal stiffness and postural defects and helps to redistribute waistline fat. It maintains lateral mobility within the spinal column and helps to increase suppleness in hip joints.



Namaskarasana (salutation pose)

Squat with the feet flat on the floor and the knees wide apart. Place the hands together at the chest in a gesture of prayer, and press the elbows against the inner side of the

knees. In this posture it is as if the elbows and knees are glued together. Where the knees go the elbows go, where the elbows go the knees go.

1. Squat with the palms together at the chest, knees and elbows wide apart, head down, and chin to chest.
 2. Inhale, raising the head and chin as high as possible while arching the back.
 3. Exhale while lowering the chin to the chest, bringing both elbows and knees together so that the arms are outstretched in front of the body.
 4. Inhale while returning to position two.
 5. Exhale and lower the head and chin to the chest.
- Repeat several times.

Benefits: This practice has a very powerful effect on the nerves of the thighs, knees, shoulders, arms, and upper back. When practised in 5 stages it also helps to develop concentration and awareness of body and breath.



Natarajasana (dancer pose)

Preparatory form: Stand erect.

Bend the left knee and grasp the left ankle with the left hand. Slowly raise the left foot behind the back as high as possible, while reaching upward and forwards with the right arm. Bring the tips of the index finger and thumb of the right hand together to form the mudra then gaze at the right hand. Hold as long as possible, then bring the left foot back down to the floor while bringing the arms back to the sides. Relax and repeat



with the right leg while balancing on the left leg.

Full form variation: This is the same as in the preparatory stage except the left big toe is held instead of the ankle. The left elbow, which is behind the back, is bent and is pointing upwards. This position of the hand and arm allows the foot to be brought nearer to the back of the head. Advanced practitioners with flexible bodies may be able to touch the back of the head with the toes or hold the toes with both hands.

This form of natarajasana should be practised after the preparatory form has been perfected.

Benefits: This asana balances the nervous system, aids in bodily control and mental concentration, and makes the legs and back supple.



Natavarasana (flute player's pose)

Stand erect and place the right foot to the left of the left leg with the toes a little above the ground and the sole almost vertical. Rest the left calf against the right shin. Raise both arms and place the hands as if playing a flute. Hold the posture as long as possible then bring the right foot and hands back to the starting position. Relax, then do the same with the left foot.

Benefits: This asana controls the nerves and aids in developing balance, concentration and attention.



Naukasana (boat pose)

Lie on the back, arms at the sides, hands palms down. Inhale, and as you exhale raise the legs, upper trunk, arms and head between half to one foot off the floor. The arms are to be held at the same level and in line with the toes. Then breathe normally and maintain this position as long as it is comfortable. The abdominal muscles should begin to vibrate slightly. Slowly lower the body and relax.

Benefits: This exercise is recommended for those who stutter; also for those plagued by stomach or intestinal worms. It is beneficial for nervous or tense children as it brings about a feeling of immediate relaxation. It maintains the muscle tone in the upper and lower abdominal muscles and strengthens the upper back muscles.



Nauka Sanchalanasana (rowing the boat)

Sit in the base position with the legs stretched out in front of the body and together. Make rowing movements with the arms, bending the body forward and backward as far as possible. Repeat 10 times forward. Reverse the movement as if you are going in the opposite direction 10 times.

Benefits: This is an excellent exercise for massaging all the abdominal organs and muscles. The forward bending movements promote forward flexion of the spinal column and the backward leaning movements strengthen the abdominal muscles. When synchronized with slow breathing it has a calming, relaxing effect.

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Padahasthasana (hand to foot pose)

Stand erect with the feet together and arms resting by the sides. Bend forward at the hip joints until the fingers or palms of the hands touch the floor on either side of the feet. Try to touch the chest to the thighs and the forehead to the knees. Do not strain but try to keep the knees straight, but not locked.

Benefits: This posture is useful for preventing or eliminating stomach and abdominal ailments. It reduces excess weight in the abdominal region,

improves digestion and helps to remove constipation. It improves blood circulation and makes the spine supple, toning the spinal nerves.

Contra-indications: Anyone with back conditions should not bend forward fully, or only with the knees slightly bent. Make sure that the forward bending is from the hips, keeping the spine straight.

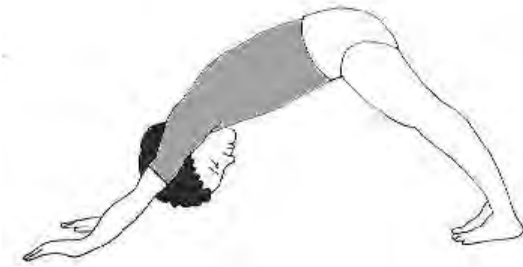
Padmasana (lotus pose)

Sit with the legs outstretched in front of the body. Bend one knee and place the same foot on top of the opposite thigh as close to the body as possible. The sole of the foot must be upward and the heel should touch the pelvic bone. Bend the other knee and place its foot on top of the other thigh. Let the hands rest on the knees. Most beginners find this posture easier to maintain if they place a low cushion under the buttocks before assuming the pose.



Benefits: This posture tones the coccygeal and sacral nerves by supplying them with an extra flow of blood. The normally large blood flow into the legs is redirected to the abdominal region. It stimulates the digestive process and when mastered allows the practitioner to hold the body completely steady for long periods of time. The practice of this asana brings a feeling of calm.

Prarambhik Sthiti (see Pawanmuktasana 1)



Parvatasana (mountain pose)

Sit in vajrasana. Lean forward, placing the palms of the hands shoulder width apart on the floor, about one foot from the knees, into the table pose, with the toes up, not outstretched. Straighten the legs while lifting the buttocks and bring the heels down to the floor. Tuck the chin in close to the chest. The head and legs should be straight and the heels flat on the floor. Breathe gently and hold for as long as it is comfortable.



Polar Bear Variation: The head is kept up, looking forward. Keeping the arms and legs straight take a few steps forward and then a few steps back to the starting position. This causes the body to look like a polar bear walking.

Benefits: Strengthens the nerves and muscles in the arms and legs. Forward bending helps keep the spine supple. It tones the spinal nerves and supplies them with a fresh blood supply. This inverted position helps to supply fresh blood to the brain.



Paschimottanasana (hairpin pose)

Sit with the legs outstretched, feet together and hands on the knees. Exhale and slowly bend forward from the hips, sliding the hands down along the legs and bringing the chest to touch the thighs and the forehead to the knees while grasping the toes. While breathing normally hold this final pose for as long as is comfortable and without strain. Inhale and slowly return to the starting position. Repeat 5 times.

Benefits: This posture stretches the hamstring muscles and increases flexibility in the hip joints. It tones and massages

the entire abdominal and pelvic region, including the liver, pancreas, spleen, kidneys and adrenal glands. It removes excess weight in this area and helps alleviate disorders of the uro-genital system. It stimulates circulation to the nerves and muscles of the spine.

Contra-indications: Anyone suffering from slipped disc or sciatica should not do this asana.

Mandala Variation

Five to six children sit in a circle with their feet towards the centre, almost touching. They lean forward in paschimottanasana, but hold the hands of the persons on their right and left.

From this position, they sit up, bring their arms straight up above their heads, still holding their neighbours' hands. Then they move into shavasana, still holding hands.

They return by sitting up with upstretched arms and after a pause, bend forward once again before returning to the sitting position.

Or: Instead of holding hands, let the arms rest by the sides. After assuming shavasana bring the legs up and over the body lifting the buttocks and then torso into sarvangasana. Then lower the right toes to the floor behind the head. Then bring the left toes to the floor behind the head. The lotus is fully in bloom. Return the left foot into the air, then the right foot, then bring both to the floor, back into shavasana. Sit up with upward stretched arms and finish with paschimottanasana.

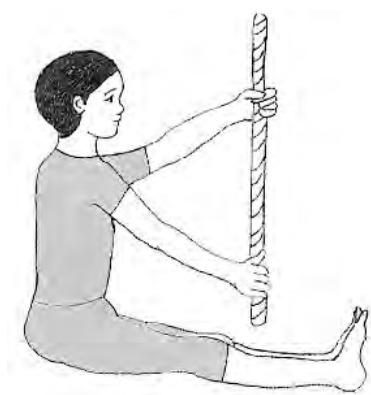
Poorna Titali Asana (butterfly pose)

Sit with the legs outstretched in front of the body. Place the soles of the feet together and bring the heels as close to the body as possible. Interlock the fingers and place them under the feet. Bring the knees downward towards the ground and raise them



up again. The knees moving up and down should make the legs look like the wings of a butterfly in flight.

Benefits: This asana is very good for bringing mobility to the hip joints. Children usually find it very enjoyable but are not necessarily able to do the final pose, so its practice should be encouraged.



R Rajju Karshanasana (pulling the rope)

Sit in the base position with the eyes open. Imagine there is a rope in front of the body and while inhaling reach up with the right hand as though to grasp the rope at a higher point, keeping the elbow straight and looking upward. While breathing out, move the right arm down, putting power into it as though pulling the rope downwards. Let the eyes follow the downward movement of the arm and hand. Repeat the same movement with the left hand. That completes one round. Both hands do not move at the same time. Practise 5 to 10 rounds with each hand.

Benefits: This posture loosens the shoulder joints and stretches the upper back muscles. It firms the breasts and develops the muscles of the chest.

S Saral Dhanurasana (simple bow pose)

Lying on the stomach, bend the knees and bring the feet close enough to reach backwards and take hold of the



ankles. Then lift the head, shoulders and chest as the legs, from the knees to the feet, are straightened. The knees, thighs and abdomen remain on the floor.

Benefits: This exercise massages the abdominal organs and muscles. It removes gastro-intestinal disorders, dyspepsia, chronic constipation and sluggishness of the liver and helps to reduce fat in the abdominal area. It promotes spinal flexibility.

Contra-indications: It should be used with care by anyone with hernia, peptic ulcers, intestinal tuberculosis or spinal deviation.



Sarpasana (snake pose)

Lie on the stomach. Place the arms behind the back and hold one of the wrists. Tense the muscles of the arms and back and raise the chest as far as possible off the ground, raising the chin as high as possible. Breathe gently and hold for as long as is comfortable. Repeat 5 times.

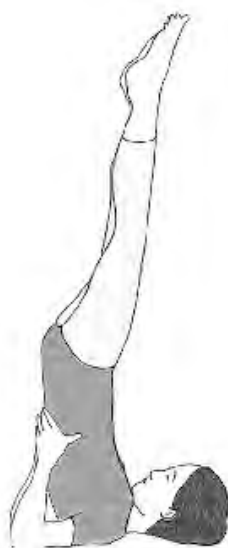
Benefits: Helps remove disorders such as leucorrhoea, dysmenorrhoea and amenorrhoea. It tones the ovaries and uterus, stimulates the appetite and eliminates constipation. Beneficial for all abdominal organs, especially the

liver and kidneys. It relocates slipped discs, removes backache and keeps the spine supple and healthy. It promotes backward flexibility of the spinal column.



Seal Pose Variation

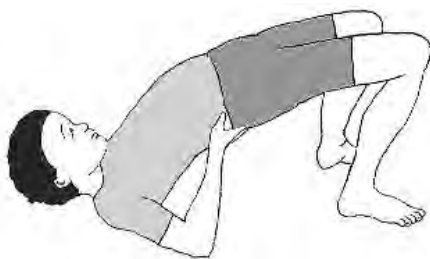
Lie on the stomach. The toes are pointed outward, heels touching. Place the hands on the back of the neck and interlace the fingers. Tense the muscles of the arms and back, and raise the chest as far as possible off the ground, raising the chin as high as possible. Breathe gently and flap the elbows like a seal, holding for as long as is comfortable. Repeat 5 times.



Sarvangasana (candle pose)

Lie flat on the back with the palms on the floor beside the thighs. Raise the legs with bent knees and slowly roll on the back up to the shoulders until the chin touches the chest. Use the hands as a support, resting on the elbows. Straighten the legs vertically. The body should now be at a right angle to the head, neck, shoulders and elbows. The back should be straight with the chin pressing the chest. To return to the lying position, bring the knees to the forehead, place the hands on the floor and lower the body and legs slowly onto the floor.

Benefits: The practice of sarvangasana supplies the thyroid gland with a rich flow of blood, thus stimulating and activating this gland which is responsible for respiratory exchange, genital and sexual development and the growth of the bones. Therefore, young children whose bodies have not developed normally should practise this pose. Children with normal growth should be allowed to practise this asana in a dynamic form, as one of many postures, in order for natural development to continue on its own. After puberty this asana may be practised without harm and with great benefit.

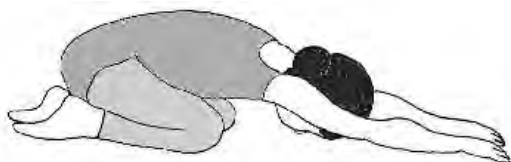


Setu Baddhasana (bound bridge pose)

Lie in shavasana. Bend the knees and bring the heels as close to the buttocks as possible. Lift the buttocks, then push down with the feet and up with the buttocks, causing the back to arch. Bend the elbows and place the hands at the waist, thumbs towards the stomach and fingertips towards the spine. Hold the position as long as it is comfortable. Stop pushing with the feet so that the upper spine returns to the floor, then lower the buttocks. Repeat several times.

Benefits: This asana stretches and massages the colon and other abdominal organs.

It is beneficial for rounded shoulders and backache. It is especially useful for toning the female reproductive organs. It is a good preparatory pose for chakrasana. The spinal arch is given a good backward bend and it is, therefore, a good posture to use as a counter pose for forward bending asanas.



Shashankasana (hare pose)

Sit in vajrasana (diamond pose) with the hands resting on the knees. Inhale gently and deeply while raising the arms above the head, then exhale while bending forward until the chest rests on the thighs and the forehead rests on the floor, arms outstretched but without tension, and with the hands resting on the floor. Return slowly back to the upright position while inhaling deeply. Repeat 5 times. After repeating 5 times inhale and return, then exhale and bring the hands to rest on the knees once again. One can also retain the pose for a while and breathe normally while relaxing in the position. If you can retain the pose for at least 30 seconds, then you need only repeat it once.

Benefits: This is especially good for the underdeveloped pelvis, therefore, very good for the female child to practise. This posture helps stimulate the digestive tract and when held for a few minutes it helps to induce calm within the body and mind.

Shashank Bhujangasana (striking cobra pose)

Sit in vajrasana. Breathe in deeply while slowly raising the arms above the head. While exhaling deeply, slowly lower the chest to the thighs and the forehead to the floor in front



of the knees. The outstretched arms are kept about shoulder width apart with the palms resting on the floor in shashankasana (hare pose). While deeply inhaling again, move the chin about 10 cms off the floor and the chest forward towards the hands, then upwards as the arms and legs are straightened and the abdomen is lowered to the floor, into bhujangasana.

In this position the back is arched and the chin is up as high as possible. While exhaling deeply, slowly bend the knees and bring the buttocks back to rest on the heels, the chest to the thighs and the forehead to the floor. The palms remain in one spot throughout the movement from shashankasana to bhujangasana and back. While inhaling, move the chin and chest forward again into the cobra posture, then while exhaling return to the hare pose.

This movement is repeated 7 times. After the seventh cobra, exhale while returning to the hare pose, then inhale while sitting upright with the arms outstretched over the head. Then exhale while slowly lowering the arms to bring the hands to rest on the knees.

Benefits: This is a very good dynamic asana since it combines both forward and backward movement of the spinal column. It stretches, tones and improves the functioning of the liver and visceral organs. It aids sufferers of sciatica, slipped disc, general back pains and displaced ribs by stretching and massaging the entire back. It gently tones the female reproductive organs and so is useful for removing menstrual disorders.



Shavasana (corpse pose)

Lie flat on the back with the spinal column straight, all the way through the neck to the back of the head, but not tense. The feet are at least shoulder width apart and the arms are comfortably by the sides with the palms upward. The eyes and mouth are gently closed. The whole body is relaxed and heavy just like a corpse, a dead body.

Benefits: Relaxes the whole psycho-physiological system. Ideally practised before sleep, before or intermittently during asana practice and particularly after dynamic exercises such as sports, games or surya namaskara (salute to the sun).



Shavasana with Abdominal Breath Variation (whale pose)

Lie in shavasana. Be totally aware of your body and the natural breath for some time. Breath deeply into your abdomen so your belly rises up. On exhalation, pucker your lips and allow the out-flowing breath to make a sound like a whale blowing out though its blowhole. The breath is long and slow. Continue for 10 breaths and then return to natural breathing.

Benefits: This asana has all the benefits of shavasana with the added benefits of deep breathing. Abdominal breathing is the most natural and efficient way to breathe. It improves and relaxes the whole psycho-physiological system. The body and mind have increased oxygen intake and absorption, and removal of toxins from the body takes place. With practice the mind and body can quickly become relaxed and balanced so that recovery from exercise or stressful activities is improved.



Shava Udarakarshanasana (sleeping spinal twist)

From shavasana (corpse pose) slide the feet together and bring the arms straight out from the shoulders. The body should look like the letter ‘T’ or a cross. Place the sole of the left foot on the right thigh just above the right knee. Reach up with the right hand and take hold of the left knee and bring it to the mat on the right side of the body. The left arm remains outstretched and the head is turned in the direction of the left hand. Pause in the asana and relax. Then bring the head back to the centre and the right hand back to the mat. Roll onto the back and lower the left leg to the mat so that the body is again in the cross pose. Repeat, placing the right foot on the thigh just above the left knee. Take hold of the right knee with the left hand and bring it to the floor on the left side of the body. Turn the head to face in the direction of the right hand.

Benefits: This posture provides lateral flexibility in the spinal column. It stimulates the spinal nerves, digestive system and the reproductive system.

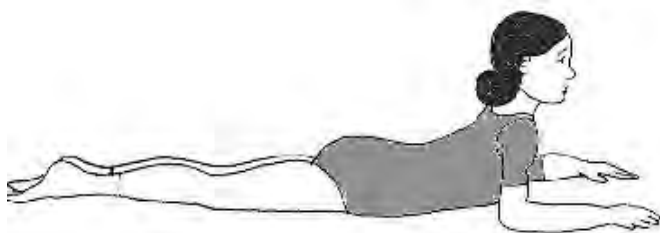
Simhasana (lion pose)



Sit in vajrasana and open the knees wide. Hold the palms downward then rotate the fingers outward, turning until the fingers are pointing towards the body. Then place the palms on the floor between the knees, leaning slightly forward to do so. Arch the back and raise the chin as high as possible as if trying to look back over the head. Hold the position as long as possible, then lower the head, relax the arch and relieve the pressure on the hands. Repeat 5 times.

This asana can be done with the tongue out or while producing a growling sound.

Benefits: This is an excellent exercise for removing diseases of the throat, nose, ears and mouth. It strengthens the pelvic muscles, which is a prevention against hernia. It strengthens the arms and provides a backward arching of the spinal column so is a good counterpose for forward bending postures. Children love this pose, especially when combined with the growling sound.



Sphinx Pose

Lie flat on the stomach with the forehead resting on the floor, legs straight with the feet together and soles of the feet facing upward, toes outstretched. Bend the elbows

and allow the forearms to rest on the floor. The elbows should be in line with the shoulders and head, keeping the forearms close to the body. Raise the head, shoulders and chest by bringing the upper arms to a vertical position, keeping the forearms and hands resting on the floor. Remain in this final position for as long as is comfortable. When combined with breathing, inhale while raising the head, shoulders and chest and pause with the breath held inside, then exhale while returning the chest, shoulders and head to the floor. Repeat 10 times before returning to shavasana.

Benefits: This posture gives the benefits derived from bhujangasana but at a reduced level. It is especially good for stiff backs. Those with acute backache or slipped disc may relax in this posture for as long as is comfortable. It is a good preparatory posture for bhujangasana.



Sukhasana (easy seat pose)

Sit with your legs stretched out in front of the body. Fold the right foot under the left thigh and the left foot under the right thigh. Place the hands on the knees with the palms facing upwards and the tip of the index finger touching the root of the thumb. The shoulders, arms, legs, neck and face should be relaxed, but keep the spine, head and neck in a straight line. If this is slightly difficult at first, a cloth may be tied around the knees for support.

Breathe normally while holding the pose, bringing your awareness to the natural breath.

Benefits: This is a simple meditation posture in which *Om* chanting, concentration practices or pranayama can be performed. It facilitates physical and mental balance.



Supta Vajrasana (reclining diamond pose)

While sitting in vajrasana, bend backward using the support of the elbows, until the top of the head touches the floor and fully arch the back. The knees should remain on the floor and the hands are placed on the thighs. Close the eyes and breathe normally. Hold for as long as is comfortable.

Benefits: The intestines are completely stretched which aids in the relief and elimination of constipation. It is also to be practised for an overactive thyroid gland when matsyasana cannot be practised.

Swastikasana (auspicious pose)



Sit in the basic pose. Bend the left knee and place the sole of the left foot against the inside of the right thigh, so there is no contact between the heel and the perineum. Bend the right knee and place the right foot in the space between the left thigh and calf muscle, so there is no contact between the heel and the pubis. Grasp the toes of the left foot and pull them up into the space between the right calf and thigh. Adjust the position so that it is comfortable. The

knees should be firmly on the floor. Straighten the spine. Place the hands on the knees in chin, jnana or chinmaya mudra.

Benefits: This asana is a healthy position to sit in, especially for those suffering from tired and aching muscles or fluid retention in the legs. One should begin by using a small cushion

Contra-indications: Swastikasana should not be performed by people with sciatica or sacral infections.

Variation: Sit in the basic pose. Bend the left leg and place the sole against the inside of the right thigh. Similarly, bend the right leg and place the heel of the right foot on the floor in front of the left foot with the sole resting against the left shin. The heels will now be one in front of the other. The hands may be placed on the knees in jnana or chin mudra, or they may be placed on the lap with the right hand resting inside the left hand.



Tadasana (tree pose)

Stand erect with the arms resting beside the body. Raise up on tiptoes and stretch the arms above the head with the palms facing upwards and fingers interlocked. Breathe normally and hold for as long as is comfortable. Lower the heels back to the floor before bringing the arms back down beside the body. Repeat 5 times.

Benefits: As this posture stretches the rectus abdomini, it opens the cardiac sphincter of the digestive system. It also helps children to straighten the spine and aids in encouraging correct posture.



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Tiryak Tadasana (swaying tree pose)

Stand erect with the feet about one and a half feet apart. Interlock the fingers and stretch the arms above the head with the palms up towards the ceiling. Bend the body first to the right and then to the left. The movement should come from the waist. Bend to each side 10 times, then relax the arms down to the sides.

Benefits: This dynamic asana is very good for aiding digestion. It reduces excess fat deposits around the waist. It helps develop balance and improves concentration.



Trikonasana (triangle pose)

Stand with the feet about one and a half feet apart and spread the arms out to the sides at shoulder level. Twist the upper body towards the left side. Bend forward and place the right palm on the floor beside the left foot. The left arm is still at shoulder level but is now pointing upward. The head should be turned to face the upward pointing left hand. Repeat, turning right and bringing the left hand to the floor beside the right foot with the right arm pointing upward and the head turned to look at the upper hand.



Planting the Flag on a Windy Day Variation

Same as the above, but move the hand back and forward as if the flag is being blown by the wind. The whole arm and hand can be moved back and forward as a variation.

Benefits: This posture stimulates the nervous system and relieves nervous depression. It stimulates the appetite, improves digestion and removes constipation. It massages the spinal nerves, muscles of the lower back and abdominal organs. It promotes lateral movements of the spinal column

Ushtrasana (camel pose)

Variation 1: Sit in vajrasana (diamond pose). While holding the heels, raise the thighs to a vertical position and arch the back and chest with the head tilted back. Breathe gently.

Variation 2: Sit in vajrasana and then raise the buttocks so that the body from head to knees is at a ninety degree angle with the lower legs. Place the hands on



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the hips. Raise the chin as high as possible, then move the shoulders backward, arching the spine. Keep the thighs straight at the ninety degree angle but arch the back and look behind you as far as possible. Slowly straighten the spine. One can also sit back down in vajrasana. Repeat 5 times.



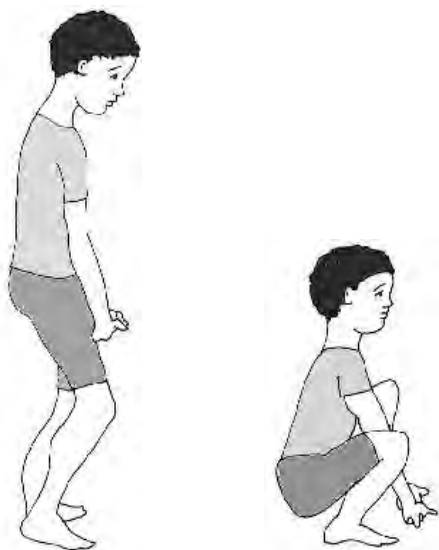
Variation 3: After the spine has been limbered up with the previous exercise, raise the feet up onto the toes so the heels are closer when you move the right hand from the waist and reach down and take hold of the right heel. Then bring the left hand to the left heel. Breathe gently and allow the breath to become relaxed. Hold for as long as is comfortable. After

practising this for a while, let the toes remain outstretched and reach down and take hold of the right heel.

Benefits: This posture exercises the abdomen, relieves constipation and tones the abdominal viscera, the liver, the pancreas and the kidneys. It aids in relieving and eliminating sluggishness of the liver and diseases of the stomach and intestines. It rectifies a rounded back and gives effective relief against backaches and lumbago. It is beneficial for the digestive, excretory and reproductive systems. It is a good exercise to relieve backache caused by sitting at a desk or at a computer for long hours.

Utthanasana (squat and rise pose)

Stand erect with the feet about 3 feet apart. Turn the toes out to the sides where they remain throughout the practice. Interlock the fingers of both hands and let them hang loosely in front of the body.

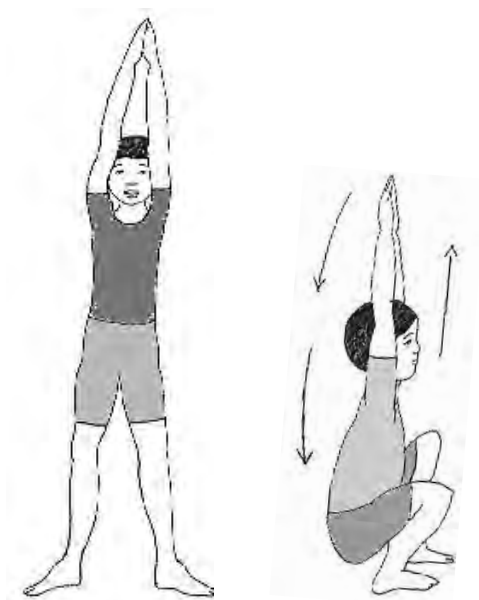


In the first stage slowly bend the knees and lower the buttocks about 20 cm. The knees should bend outward over the toes and the spine should be straight. Straighten the knees and return to the upright position.

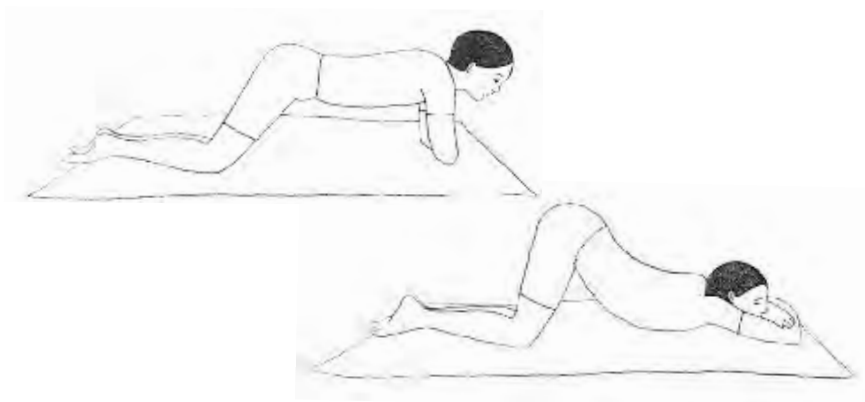
Repeat the bending motions again, coming closer to the ground with the buttocks. Remember to keep the spine straight and the knees bending outward. Return to the upright position as before. Repeat these movements until the hands finally rest on the floor, keeping the arms and shoulders loose and avoid leaning forward. Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable, then return to the upright position and relax.

Rocket Ship Pose Variation

Stand with the feet slightly apart to maintain balance. Stretch the arms above the head and bring the palms together. While counting backwards from ten, slowly bend the knees, coming ever closer to the floor and reaching a squatting position by the time zero is reached. Then sweep the arms down shouting ‘blast off’ and jump up as high as possible, spreading the arms wide.



Benefits: This is a squatting balance pose. This posture strengthens the uterine muscles, inner thighs, knees and ankles. It helps to develop correct posture and balance so is useful for developing concentration.



Utthan Pristhasana (lizard pose)

Lie on the stomach with the arms crossed under the lower chest, holding the upper arms (biceps). The toes are stretched out, head facing forwards and the body weight

pressing on the forearms. The elbows should not move during the entire round. Inhale while raising the trunk and buttocks so that one is supported by the knees and the upper arms. Bend the knees and stretch the torso backwards so that the chin and chest are placed on the ground. Exhale while returning to the raised position and then to the lying position. Repeat at least 10 times.

Benefits: This is a good asana to practise as a counterpose to forward bending asanas. It exercises and strengthens the diaphragm and tones the entire back, especially the nerves and muscles. It helps remove congestion from the lungs.



Utthita Lolasana (rag doll pose)

Stand erect with the feet a metre apart. Raise the arms over the head, keeping the elbows straight. Bend the wrists forward so that the hands hang limp. Bend forward and swing the trunk down from the hips, allowing the arms and head to swing through the legs. Be tension free like a rag doll. On the upswing, raise the trunk so that it is parallel to the floor. On the downward swing bring the hands as far back as possible behind the feet. After 5 complete swings

return to the upright position with the arms raised, then lower the arms to the sides. Repeat up to 5 times.

Benefits: This asana helps remove tiredness by stimulating the circulation and toning the spinal nerves. It stretches the hamstrings and back muscles, loosens the hips and massages the visceral organs. It speeds up the lymphatic flow in the major ducts and improves drainage, especially from the abdomen and the base of the lungs. This is an excellent pre-pranayama practice as it opens up all the alveoli and rebalances the ventilation-perfusion matching in the lungs. It has the added benefits of inverted asanas, especially on the brain.

Contra-indications: Not to be practised by anyone suffering from vertigo, high blood pressure or back conditions.

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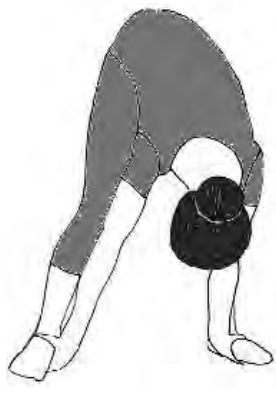
Vajrasana (diamond or thunderbolt pose)

Kneel on the floor with the knees together, the heels apart and the big toes just slightly touching. Lower the buttocks onto the soles of the feet, with the heels at the sides of the hips. Place the hands on the knees, palms downward. Close the eyes and be aware of the body and let it become relaxed, but remain upright in the posture.

Benefits: Physically this asana aids digestion and may be safely practised directly after meals. It tones the whole body and is an easy posture for sitting in for some time.

Vayu Nishkasana (squat and stand pose)

Squat with both feet flat on the floor. If the heels will not touch the floor, then place a blanket or pillow under them so that the whole foot is taking the body weight, not just the toes. Place the fingers under the feet from the inside so that the fingers are under the arches, backs of the hands resting on the floor, with the elbows pressing against the inner sides of the knees. Inhale and raise the head. Keep



the head up and exhale while standing up, straightening the legs, then lowering the chin to the chest. Maintain the position for a few seconds. Raise the head and inhale while sitting down. Repeat the same process 10 times slowly and with great control and awareness.

Benefits: This posture is good for the nerves of the thighs, knees, shoulders and arms. It stretches the hamstrings and promotes flexibility of the knee and hip joints.

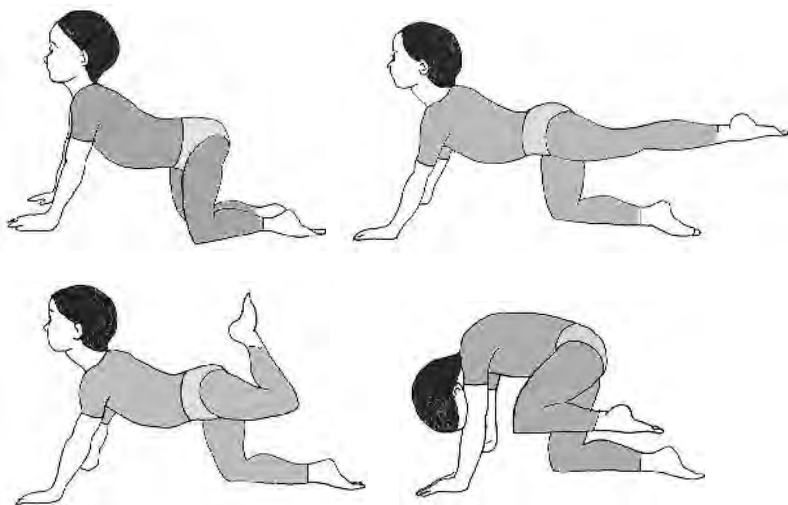
Contra-indications: It should not be done by anyone with high blood pressure.



Vipareeta Karani Asana (inverted pose)

Lie flat on the back, feet together, with the arms by the sides and the palms flat on the ground. Using the arms as a lever, raise the legs to a vertical position. Bend the elbows and bring the palms up and lower the torso so that the buttocks are resting in the palms. The toes and the elbows are forming a forty-five degree angle. It is very similar to sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose) but is easier, so recommended as a preparatory pose for sarvangasana.

Benefits: This posture supplies the thyroid gland with a rich flow of blood, thus stimulating and activating this gland which is responsible for respiratory exchange, genital and sexual development and the growth of the bones. Therefore, young children whose bodies have not developed normally should practise this asana. Children with normal growth should only be allowed to practise this asana in a dynamic form as one of many postures, in order that normal development may continue naturally. After puberty this asana may be practised without harm and with great benefit.



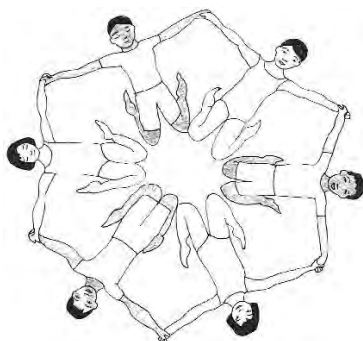
Vyaghrasana (tiger pose)

Sit in vajrasana (diamond pose), move forward into the table pose and look straight ahead. Stretch the left leg backwards, parallel to the ground. Inhale deeply while bending the left knee and raising it, pointing the toes towards the head. Raise the chin as high as possible as if you want to touch the back of the head with the left toes. While exhaling deeply, slowly bring the left knee down under the body and bring the thigh against the chest and the chin down so that the forehead touches the knee.

Inhale and repeat the same movement again. As you exhale make a 'roaring sound'. Do a number of rounds. Relax briefly and then do the same with the right leg.

Benefits: This asana exercises the spine, by bending it alternately in both ways. It relieves the sciatic nerve, loosens up and tones the legs, massages and stretches the abdominal organs and muscles. Blood circulation is stimulated. Children enjoy roaring like the tiger.

GROUP ASANAS



Making a Mandala

A mandala is a collection of geometrical patterns. In this technique we make a large circle or maybe a circle within a circle, depending upon the number of children involved. In yoga, colours and shapes are very important for influencing the deeper level of the child's mind.

Sit in a circle in vajrasana (diamond pose), with enough space so that when you lean forward into shashankasana, the fingertips touch. Then take hold of the hands of those on either side and sit back up in vajrasana with the arms raised above the head. Slowly bring the elbows to the mat and allow the body to lie on the mat as in supta vajrasana, still holding the hands of the persons on either side. Pause, then slowly sit up with the arms outstretched above the head and then bring the hands to the knees as in vajrasana.

Benefits: This practice has all the benefits of vajrasana, shashankasana and supta vajrasana. These are a big favourite with children and adults as well.

Variation: Standing in a circle(s), the left palm faces the ceiling and the right palm faces the floor so that the hands are joined with the next person. First we create an atmosphere in the group. We create a link through breathing. Inhale through the left palm, and then exhale through the right palm. Feel that a current is passing through the hands and around the circle. Close the eyes and go on inhaling through the left palm and exhaling through the right. It is like electricity passing from left to right. Then relax the arms and release the hands of your neighbours.

ASANA SEQUENCES

Surya Namaskara (salute to the sun)

First half round:



Position 1: Khada Pranamasana

Face the sun if possible. Stand erect with the legs together. Place the palms together, resting on the chest in pranam mudra, arms relaxed against the body. Breathe in and out as much as necessary, until the breath is normal. The spinal column is straight but not rigid; the whole body is completely relaxed.



Position 2: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the outstretched arms. Tilt the pelvis while arching the back and bending the head back. The spinal column is arched slightly in the beginning. The amount of the arch can increase with constant practice.

Position 3: Padahastasana

Exhale deeply while slowly bending forward with straight legs until the head touches the knees. Place the fingers in line beside the toes on the floor. The spinal column is bent forward at the hip joints. In the beginning go as far towards the floor as possible with the hands, but do not bend the knees. With practice it will come easily.



Position 4: Ashwa Sanchalanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly moving the left leg back, away from the body in a backward stretch, though not too far. The left toe and knee touch the floor. Arch the back and look up. The spinal column is once again arched and the chin should be raised as high as possible. After some practice the spinal arch will become very pronounced.



Position 5: Parvatasana

Exhale deeply while slowly stretching the right leg back beside the left leg. Push the buttocks up into the air to form the apex of a triangle and tuck the chin down to the chest so that the head is between the arms. The spinal column is straight. Forward bending takes place at the hip joints, and the chin is tucked close to the chest so that blood flows easily to the head. This is often called the dog pose.



Position 6: Ashtanga Pranamasana

While inhaling deeply, slowly lower the knees to the floor then place the chest between the hands on the floor and bring the chin down to rest on the floor.



Only the toes, knees, chest, hands and chin are resting on the floor. Exhale and inhale as much as necessary in this position. The spinal column is arched slightly in this balancing pose. With practice one can lower oneself down to the floor so that the knees, chest and chin touch at the same time.

Position 7: Tiryaka Bhujangasana

While inhaling deeply, slowly lower the abdomen to the floor and raise the chin and shoulders, arching the back into the cobra posture. Exhale and slowly twist the upper body slightly to the right and look over the right shoulder at the left heel. Inhale as the face is slowly brought forward again. Exhale slowly, turning towards the left, looking over the left shoulder at the right heel. Inhale slowly, returning to face forward. The spinal arch is continued and lateral movement is also brought in.



Position 8: Parvatasana

Relax the arch and exhale deeply while slowly lifting the buttocks and bringing the heels back down to the floor. The body should look like a triangle as in position 5 with the chin tucked close to the chest.



Position 9: Ashwa Sanchalanasana

While inhaling deeply, slowly bring the right foot forward and place it on the floor between the two hands, and lower the left knee down to the floor, arching the back, looking up. This looks like position 4. The chin is as high as possible.



Position 10: Padahastasana

While exhaling, slowly bring the left foot forward between the hands, next to the right foot. The legs are straight and the forehead is brought to the knees, as in position 3. Forward bending should take place at the hip joints.



Position 11: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the body and the outstretched arms overhead. Tilt the pelvis then arch the back, and raise the chin as high as possible, as in position 2.



Position 12: Khada Pranamasana

Exhale while bringing the palms together on the chest in pranam mudra, standing erect as in position 1. The spine is straight but not rigid, and the body is relaxed. Watch the breath return to normal.



Second half round: The second half of the round differs in that for position 4 the right leg is taken back and in position 9 it is the left foot that is brought forward between the hands. When the heartbeat and breath are normal, then start the second half of the round.

Benefits: When one performs the twelve positions of surya namaskara coupled with the prescribed pranayama, every muscle, joint and all major internal organs are affected. It is for this reason that surya namaskara is one of the most important and beneficial practices to be learned and mastered by persons who have only a limited amount of time to devote to the practice of asana and pranayama. The great innovator of the modern yoga renaissance, Swami Sivananda, saw the practice of surya namaskara as a yoga tonic. This set of postures stretches the muscles in the legs that are used in broad jump and high jumping.

Positions 1 and 12 establish a state of concentration, calmness and awareness of the practice being performed.

Positions 2 and 11 stretch the abdominal and intestinal muscles fully, exercise the arms and tone the spinal cord.

Positions 3 and 10 aid in preventing, relieving and eliminating stomach ailments. They reduce surplus fat on the abdomen, improve digestion, aid in eliminating constipation, improve circulation and keep the spine supple.

Positions 4 and 9 tone the abdominal muscles, strengthening the muscles of the thighs and legs, exercise the spine and supply the spinal nerves with fresh blood.

Positions 5 and 8 strengthen the nerves and muscles of the arms and legs, exercise the spine and adequately supply the spinal nerves with fresh blood. It is an inverted posture which can be practised by those who are unable to do sirshasana, the headstand pose, because of myopia.

Positions 6 and 7 tone the shoulder and arm muscles and develop the chest. In position 7 the abdomen is compressed; this helps to squeeze stagnant blood from the abdominal organs and encourage a flow of fresh blood. This pose is useful for all stomach ailments, including indigestion and constipation. The arching of the back exercises the spine, making the muscles supple, and revitalizes the most important spinal nerves. It is the fourth asana in the gastro-intestinal cleansing practice of shankhaprakshalana, which can be taught to children aged seven or eight onwards. Shankhaprakshalana is used with children who have diabetes or epilepsy, but should be done only under the careful guidance of a qualified teacher.

Chandra Sequence

First half round:

Position 1

Sit in vajrasana, with the palms together, resting on the chest in pranam mudra, arms relaxed against the body. Breathe out and in as much as necessary, until the breath is normal. The spinal column is straight but not rigid; the whole body is completely relaxed.



Position 2

Breathe out while bringing the body to a kneeling position and bringing the right foot to the floor about 35 to 45 cms in front of the body.



Position 3

Inhale and stretch the arms straight out in front of the body.



Position 4

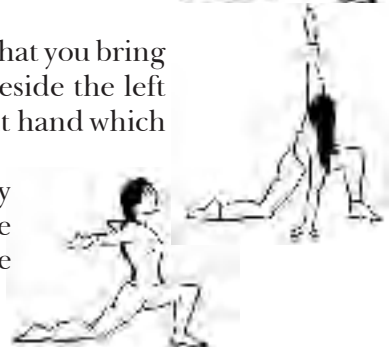
Inhale while opening the arms as wide as possible, giving a good opening stretch to the chest.



Position 5

Exhale and tilt the body so that you bring the left hand to the floor beside the left foot and look up at the right hand which is up in the air.

Inhale and bring the body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched to the sides as in position 4.





Position 6

Exhale and tilt the body so that you bring the right hand to the floor beside the left foot and look up at the left hand which is up in the air.

Inhale and bring the body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched to the sides as in position 4.



Position 7

Exhale and twist the body towards the left, following with the head.

Inhale and straighten the body, keeping the arms outstretched as in position 4.



Position 8

Exhale and twist the body towards the right side, again following with the head.

Inhale and straighten the body, keeping the arms outstretched as in position 4.



Position 9

Exhale and stretch the right arm forward. Bend the left knee and reach back with the left hand and take hold of the left foot.

Inhale and bring body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched by the sides as in position 4.



Position 10

Exhale and stretch the left arm forward, bend the left knee, reach back with the right hand and take hold of the left foot.

Inhale and bring body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched by the sides as in position 4.

Position 11

Bring the right knee back to the floor beside the left knee and bring the hands back into the position of pranam mudra as in position 1.



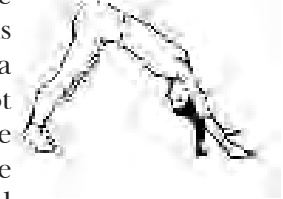
Position 12

Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees. Bring the hands to the floor, shoulder width apart so the body looks like a table.



Position 13

Exhale and bring the toes up, then place the feet flat on the floor with the buttocks up in the air so that the body looks like a triangle. Be sure that the shoulders are not over the hands but at an angle behind the hands so that placing the feet flat on the floor is easy. The chin should be tucked into the chest.



Position 14

Inhale and raise the head and chin and lift the right leg as high as possible. Exhale and lower the right leg back to the floor and tuck the chin to the chest as in position 13.



Position 15

Inhale and bend the knees and exhale while returning to sitting on the heels with the head resting on the floor between the outstretched arms as in shashankasana.



Position 16

Inhale and move from shashankasana to bhujangasana as in striking cobra, with the toes up rather than outstretched.





Position 17

Exhale and twist the body towards the right, then inhale and bring the face back forward as in *tiryaka bhujangasana*.

Exhale and twist the body towards the left, then inhale and bring the face forward again.

After completing position 17, then repeat 16, 15, 13, then 14, 13, 12, 11.

Second half round: Repeat the whole sequence again with the left knee up and raising the left leg in position 14.

Benefits: This sequence of asanas has all the benefits of the major asanas used in the sequence. It provides forward, backward, side to side and lateral movements for the spinal column.

Ardha Chandra Namaskara (salute to the half moon)

First half round:



Position 1: Khada Pranamasana

Stand erect with the legs together. The palms are together resting on the chest in *pranam mudra*, the arms relaxed against the body. Breathe out and in as much as necessary until the breath is normal. The spinal column is straight but not rigid, the whole body is completely relaxed.



Position 2: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the outstretched arms. Tilt the pelvis while arching the back and bend the head back. The spinal column is arched slightly in the beginning. Ultimately, after intensive practice, the amount of the arch can be so great that the body looks like a crescent moon.

Position 3: Padahastasana

Exhale deeply while slowly bending forward at the hip joints, with straight legs until the head touches the knees. Place the hands in line beside the feet on the floor. In the beginning go as far towards the floor as possible with the hands but do not bend the knees. It will come easily with practice.



Position 4: Ardha Chandrasana

Inhale deeply while slowly moving the right leg back, away from the body in a backward stretch, though not too far back. The top of the right foot, lower leg and knee are resting on the floor. Arch the back and look up, raising the chin as high as possible. Bring the palms together, then bring the outstretched arms over the head. From fingertips to tips of toes gives the appearance of a crescent moon.



Position 5: Parvatasana

Relax the arch and bring the hands back to the floor beside the left foot. Exhale while bringing the right foot back between the hands beside the left foot. The legs are straight and the forehead is brought to the knees, as in position 3.



Position 6: Ardha Chandrasana

Inhale deeply while bringing the left foot forward between the hands and slowly raising the outstretched arms overhead, arching back and raising the chin as high as possible, as in position 4.





Position 7: Padahasthasana

Exhale and bring the right foot up between the hand and stand with forehead to knees.



Position 8: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale and stand upright, keeping the arms outstretched above head as in position 2.



Position 9: Kadha Pranamasana

Exhale while bringing the palms together on the chest in pranam mudra, standing erect as in position 1. The spinal column is straight but not rigid, the body is relaxed and awareness is on the natural breath until it is normal again. Then begin the second half of the round.

Second half round: The second half of the round differs in that in position 4 the left foot is stretched backwards. Make sure the breath and heart beat are not fast before beginning the second half round (or any yoga practice

for that matter). This version of chandra namaskara and a similar adaptation of surya namaskara are being used in classrooms when mats or blankets for practice are unavailable.

Benefits: This sequence of asanas gives the benefits attained in the first five asanas of surya namaskara and the change in the position 4 demands more attention and helps to develop concentration and poise. Ardha chandra namaskara can be done in the classroom when children do not have the benefit of a mat or blanket to practice on.

Poorna Chandra Namaskara (moon salutations)

Poorna chandra namaskara is very similar to the surya namaskara sequence. Only positions 4 and 9 are different in chandra namaskara – they become a balancing asana and, therefore, a little more difficult.

First half round:

Position 1: Khada Pranamasana

Stand erect with the legs together, palms together resting on the chest in pranam mudra, arms relaxed against the body. Breathe in and out as much as necessary, until the breath is normal. The spinal column is straight but not rigid; the whole body is completely relaxed.



Position 2: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the outstretched arms, tilt the pelvis while arching the back and bend the head back. The spinal column is arched slightly in the beginning. Ultimately, after intensive practice the amount of the arch can be so great that the body looks like a crescent moon.



Position 3: Padahasthasana

Exhale deeply while slowly bending forward at the hip joints, with straight legs until the head touches the knees. Place the hands in line beside the feet on the floor. In the beginning go as far towards the floor as possible with the hands but do not bend the knees. It will come easily with practice.



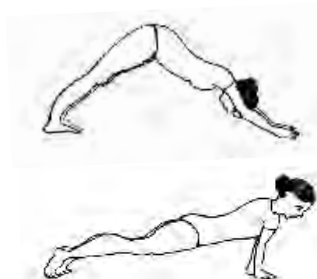
Position 4: Ardha Chandrasana

Inhale deeply while slowly moving the right leg back, away from the body in a backward stretch, though not too far back. Arch the back and look up, raising the chin as high as possible. Bring the palms together, and then bring the outstretched arms over the head. From fingertips to tips of toes gives the appearance of a crescent moon.



Position 5: Parvatasana

Exhale deeply while slowly stretching the right leg back beside the left leg. Push the buttocks up into the air to form the apex of a triangle and tuck the chin down to the chest so that the head is between the arms. The spinal column is straight, forward bending takes place at the hip joints, and the chin is tucked close to the chest so that blood flows easily to the head. This is often called the dog pose.



Position 6: Ashtanga Pranamasana

While inhaling deeply, slowly lower the knees to the floor then place the chest between the hands on the floor and bring the chin down to rest on the floor. Only the toes, knees, chest, hands and chin are resting on the floor. Exhale and inhale as much as necessary in this position. The spinal column is arched slightly in this balancing pose. With practice one can lower oneself down to the floor so that the knees, chest and chin touch at the same time.



Position 7: Tiriyaka Bhujangasana

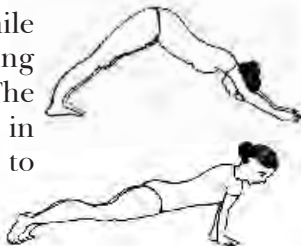
While inhaling deeply, slowly lower the abdomen to the floor and raise the chin and shoulders, arching the back into the cobra posture. Exhale and slowly twist the upper body slightly to the right and look over the right shoulder at the left heel. Inhale as the face is slowly brought forward again. Exhale slowly, turning towards the left, looking



over the left shoulder at the right heel. Inhale slowly, returning face forward. The spinal arch is continued and lateral movement is also brought in.

Position 8: Parvatasana

Relax the arch and exhale deeply while slowly lifting the buttocks and bringing the heels back down to the floor. The body should look like a triangle as in position 5 with the chin tucked close to the chest.



Position 9: Ardha Chandrasana

Inhale and bring the left foot forward and place between the hands. The top of the right foot, lower leg and knee are resting on the floor. Arch the back and look up, raising the chin as high as possible. Bring the palms together, and then bring the outstretched arms over the head. From fingertips to tips of toes gives the appearance of a crescent moon.



Position 10: Padahasthasana

While exhaling, slowly bring the right foot forward between the hands beside the left foot. The legs are straight and the forehead is brought to the knees, as in position 3. Forward bending takes place at the hip joints.



Position 11: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the body and the outstretched arms overhead, tilt the pelvis then arch the back, and raise the chin as high as possible, as in position 2.





Position 12: Khada Pranamasana

Exhale while bringing the palms together on the chest in pranam mudra, standing erect as in position 1. The spinal column is straight but not rigid, the body is relaxed and awareness is on the natural breath until it is normal again. Then begin the second half of the round.

Second half round: The second half of the round differs in that in position 4 the left foot is stretched backwards. Make sure the breath and heart beat are not fast before beginning the second half round (or any yoga practice for that matter).

Benefits: Chandra namaskara has all the benefits of surya namaskara. The change of asana in position 4 brings about more concentration since the posture is a balancing asana.

Chandra Namaskara Sequence

Chandra namaskara sequence is very similar to chandra sequence and chandra namaskara. Chandra namaskara brings more variety to the movements for the spinal column. The additions in this sequence are in positions 4, 5, 8, 9. All other asanas in the sequence of twelve remain the same as in surya or chandra namaskara, except position 7 which becomes bhujangasana instead of tiryaka bhujangasana.



First half round:

Position 1: Khada Pranamasana

Stand erect with the legs together, palms together resting on the chest in pranam mudra and arms relaxed against the body. Breathe out and in as much as necessary, until the breath is normal. The spinal column is straight but not rigid; the whole body is completely relaxed.

Position 2: Hasta Utthanasana

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the outstretched arms. Tilt the pelvis while arching the back and bend the head back. The spinal column is arched slightly in the beginning. Ultimately, after intensive practice the amount of the arch can be so great that the body looks like a crescent moon.



Position 3: Padahastasana

Exhale deeply while slowly bending forward at the hip joints, with straight legs until the head touches the knees. Place the hands in line beside the feet on the floor. In the beginning go as far towards the floor as possible with the hands but do not bend the knees. It will come easily with practice.



Position 4a: Ardha Chandrasana

Inhale deeply while slowly moving the right leg back, away from the body in a backward stretch, though not too far back. Bend the knee so that the top of the right foot, lower leg and knee are resting on the floor. Arch the back and look up, raising the chin as high as possible while bringing the palms together, then raising the outstretched arms over the head. From fingertips to tips of toes gives the appearance of a crescent moon.



Position 4b

Exhale and bring the palms together back to the chest in pranam mudra.





Position 4c

Inhale and spread the arms out to either side of the body as far as possible.



Position 4d

Exhale and tilt the body so that you bring the left hand to the floor beside the left foot and look up at the right hand which is up in the air. Inhale and bring the body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched by the sides.



Exhale and tilt the body so that you bring the right hand to the floor beside the left foot and look up at the left hand which is up in the air.

Inhale and bring body upright again, keeping the arms outstretched by the sides.



Position 4e

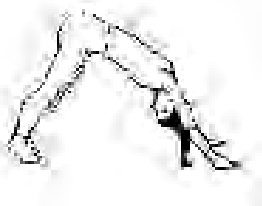
Exhale and twist the body towards the left, following with the head.

Inhale and bring the body straight, facing forward, keeping the arms outstretched.



Exhale and twist the body towards the right side, again following with the head.

Inhale and straighten the body keeping the arms outstretched.



Position 5: Parvatasana

Exhale and bring the hands back to the floor beside the left foot. Then place the left foot back beside the right foot, straighten both the arms and legs and raise the buttocks as high in the air as possible. The chin should be tucked into the chest.

Position 5a

Inhale and raise the head and chin and lift the left leg as high as possible. Exhale and lower the left leg back to the floor and tuck the chin into the chest.



Position 5b

Inhale and raise the head and chin and lift the right leg as high as possible. Exhale and lower the right leg back to the floor and tuck the chin into the chest.



Position 6: Ashtanga Pranamasana

While inhaling deeply, slowly lower the knees to the floor; then place the chest between the hands on the floor and bring the chin down to rest on the floor. Only the toes, knees, chest, hands and chin are resting on the floor.

Exhale and inhale as much as necessary in this position.

The spinal column is arched slightly in this balancing pose. With practice one can lower oneself down to the floor so that the knees, chest and chin touch at the same time.



Position 7: Bhujangasana

Inhale deeply and slowly lower the abdomen to the floor and raise the chin and shoulders, arching the back into the cobra posture. The spinal arch is continued.



Position 8: Parvatasana and Variations 5a & 5b (see position 5)

Exhale and lift the buttocks into the air and bring the soles of the feet to the floor.

Inhale, raise the left leg, head and chin.
Exhale, lower the left leg, head and chin.
Inhale, raise the right leg, head and chin
Exhale, lower the right leg, head and chin.

Position 9: Ardha Chandrasana and Variations 4a–4f (see position 4)

Inhale and bring the left foot back up between the hands and bring the right knee back down to the floor, arching and bringing the palms together above the head.

Position 10: Padahasthasana (see position 3)

Exhale and relax the arch and bring the hands back to the floor beside the left foot. Exhale while bringing the right foot back up between the hands beside the left foot. The legs are straight and the forehead is brought to the knees, as in position 3.

Position 11: Hasta Utthanasana (see position 2)

Inhale deeply while slowly raising the outstretched arms overhead, arching back and raising the chin as high as possible, as in position 2.

Position 12: Khada Pranamasana (see position 1)

Exhale while bringing the palms together on the chest in pranam mudra, standing erect as in position 1. The spinal column is straight but not rigid, the body is relaxed and awareness is on the natural breath until it is normal again. Then begin the second half of the round.

Second half round: The second half of the round differs in position 4, where the left foot is stretched backwards. Make sure the breath and heart beat are not fast before beginning the second half round (or before beginning any yoga practice for that matter).

Benefits: The chandra namaskara sequence brings more spinal column flexibility than surya or chandra namaskara. In position 4 variations, the spinal column receives side to side movements as well as lateral twisting movements. Also, the neck receives an array of movements, not achieved by surya or chandra namaskara. Postures that are the same receive the same benefits.

Warrior Sequence

The warrior sequence has five levels, each one bringing a different flexion for the spine. For all levels the positions are performed turning to the right side, then repeated with the body facing to the left side instead.

Level I

Position 1: Stand erect with the arms by the sides and the feet facing forward about a metre apart. Inhale while raising the outstretched arms with palms upward, bringing the palms together above the head.



Position 2: Hold the breath in while pivoting the right foot towards the right and turning the upper body towards the right.



Position 3: Exhale as you bend the forward right knee and bring the hands, palms still together, into pranam mudra, hands at heart level (called warrior pose).



Position 4: Keep the forward knee bent. While inhaling, stretch the arms forward and stretch the body over the forward right knee.



Position 5: Then exhale back into warrior pose, bringing the hands back in front of the chest, palms together in pranam mudra.



Position 6: Inhale and raise the arms over the head once again, this time straightening the forward knee and pivoting the right foot and upper body back around to the front.





Position 7: Exhale as you sweep the arms back down the sides of the body, bringing them back to hang alongside the body.

Level 2

Right side: Numbers 1, 2 and 3 positions are the same as at level 1.

The only change is in position 4.

Position 4: Keep the forward knee bent while inhaling and raising the arms above the head and arching the back as much as possible, looking upwards. Then exhale back into the warrior pose followed by positions 2 and 1.

Left side: is the same as for the right, only the left foot pivots and the body turns to left side.



Level 3

Right side: Again positions 1, 2, 3 remain the same, only position 4 changes.

Position 4: Inhale as you bring the palm of the right hand to the floor inside the right foot and stretch the left arm over the head. Look straight ahead, the arm can rest on the head.

Exhale to warrior pose, then continue with positions 2 then 1.

Left side: is the same as for the right, only the left foot pivots and the body turns to left side.



Level 4

Right side: Again positions 1, 2 and 3 remain the same, only position 4 changes.

Position 4: Inhale as you bring the palm of the left hand to the floor inside the right foot. Keeping the arms straight, stretch the right arm above and turn the head to look at the



upward stretched arm. Then continue as you exhale into position 3, inhale to position 2, and exhale to position 1.

Left side: is the same as for the right, only the left foot pivots and body turns to left side.

Level 5

Right side: Again positions 1, 2 and 3 remain the same, however, at this level we make changes at position 4, adding 4b and 4c, then positions 5, 6 and 7 are the same as in all the other levels.

Position 4a: Keep the forward knee bent. While inhaling, bend forward and bring the fingertips of the hands to touch the floor just inside the right foot.



Position 4b: Exhale and bend the elbows, bringing them to the floor, and bring the head to rest on the hand that is on the floor.



Position 4c: Inhale and straighten the elbows again, fingertips still touching the floor. Exhale to warrior position 5 and continue with positions 6 and 7.



Left side: is the same as for the right, only the left foot pivots and the body turns to the left side.

As in the previous levels, the body is turned towards the left so that it is the left knee that is bent. The body is arched, stretched forward or bent forward to the left side.

Practice note: As with all dynamic sequences, and indeed most asanas, it is important to make the length of your breath and the time it takes to do the movement coincide. As you start the movement you start the breath. This will lead to graceful and effortless asana practice and will carry through into your daily life in the form of poise and economy of energy.

The special points to watch are that the trailing foot in position 5 of each variation is kept *flat* on the floor and does not pivot around with the other foot. Also try not to rest your weight on your arms in level 5.

Benefits: This sequence develops strong leg muscles and flexibility of the spinal column. It develops balance and concentration. It helps to bring more flexibility to the hip joints and strengthens the knees. This set of exercises are often first choice by teachers who are required to do twenty minutes daily physical activity with the children as in the province of Ontario, Canada. They do not need mats or blankets for this set of exercises. This sequence takes about ten minutes done slowly with deep breathing. It contains all the elements necessary for a complete yoga practice, including forward and backward bending, side to side movements, as well as twisting and stretching of the spinal column. It also has inversion and balancing, so is an excellent sequence to do.

PRANAYAMA

Introduction

Our lives, our bodily functions, our way of life is intended normally to be guided by rhythms in our internal and external surroundings. Yet, modern, industrialized, materialistic life has cut us off from the influence of these rhythms of nature and affects even our children. As a result, natural rhythms such as breathing are disturbed and we suffer disease and poor health.

In the ancient text on yoga, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, it is written, “Life is the period between one breath and the next; a person who only half breathes only half lives. He, who breathes correctly, acquires control of the whole being.”

Modern scientific investigations into the effects of breathing techniques on the individual indicate that pranayama is not only important for the oxygenation of the system and

providing strong lungs, but has an affect on different areas in the brain as well. It is with this knowledge that many exercises are being used to bring about emotional stability in maladjusted children. Children who are encouraged to breathe properly become self-confident, less fearful and less susceptible to colds and other diseases. Children should be encouraged to breathe through the nostrils in order for the air to be warmed and filtered of infectious bacilli and dust from the air.

There are two types of pranayama: hatha yoga pranayama and raja yoga pranayama. Hatha yoga pranayama concerns the physical act of breathing, such as bhramari, abdominal, nadi shodhana pranayama, etc. Raja yoga pranayama concerns the mental act of breathing which may be performed in conjunction with the physical act of breathing, such as in mental nadi shodhana, or may just entail mental practice as in using the fingers, arms, legs or a picture for practising nadi shodhana.

Pranayama should also be practised only on an empty stomach and when the body is totally relaxed. As in the practice of asanas, the bowels and bladder should also be empty during pranayama.

Pranayama practices for children should be graduated and suited to their age. Very young children love bhramari because it is noisy, but it helps them to calm down and lengthen the breath with practice. Even the youngest of children enjoy deep breathing because they do it naturally.

Yogic Pranayama (complete breath)

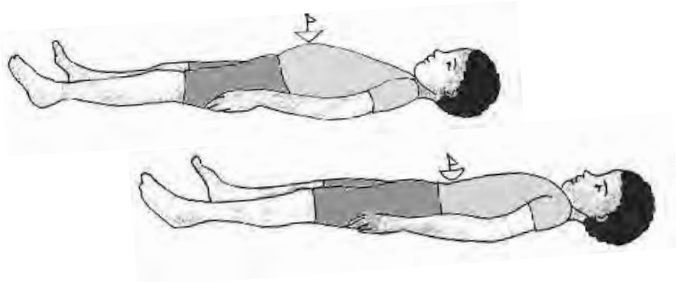
Sit in a relaxed posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand fully. Try to breathe so slowly that little or no sound of the breath can be heard. Feel the air reaching into the bottom of the lungs. At the end of abdominal expansion, start to expand the chest outward and upward. When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of



the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collarbone should also move up slightly. Some tension will be felt in the neck muscles. The rest of the body should be relaxed. Feel the air filling the upper lobes of the lungs. This completes one inhalation, with the whole process being one continuous movement – each phase merging into the next. Pause with the breath inside, then begin exhaling, letting the shoulders relax, then the chest move downward and inward, and finally emptying the lungs completely, feeling as if the navel is going to meet the backbone. Again, while exhaling the entire movement should be harmonious and flowing. Pause again before starting the second inhalation. Begin with 5 to 10 rounds and with practice increase to ten minutes or eventually a complete mala of 108 rounds.

Boat Breathing Variation

To encourage abdominal breathing, ask the child to lie down on the floor. Place a small paper boat, which the child can make previously, at the navel. Explain that when he breathes in, a wave is created by the stomach as it swells out. When he breathes out, the wave subsides. By being able to watch the boat on the waves, the child is able to develop awareness of the abdomen and abdominal breathing, which the young child does naturally and unconsciously. Any



object can be used for the child to observe on the waves, e.g. a rubber fish, duck boat or any soft toy.

Benefits: Abdominal breathing is really a natural breath for children. It is only as we become adults that we start to breathe incorrectly. Abdominal breathing has been shown to be the best form of breathing because it requires less energy than chest or upper lung breathing, and the oxygen/carbon dioxide exchange is greater during this type of breathing.

Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (alternate nostril breathing)

Sit in any comfortable asana with the spine erect and both knees resting on the floor.

Stage 1: The left hand is placed on the left knee. The right hand is used to close the nostrils in the following way: the index and middle fingers are placed in the centre of the eyebrows and remain in this position throughout the practice. The thumb is used to close the right nostril, and the ring finger is used to close the left nostril. Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the same nostril, keeping the right nostril closed throughout. Repeat this 5 times. Then inhale and exhale through the right nostril, closing the left one. Repeat this 5 times. The process of inhaling and exhaling through each nostril is equal to one round.



Stage 2: Happy Breathing

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Inhale through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with the ring finger and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril closing, the right nostril. This is one round.

Benefits: This breathing exercise induces a state of calmness and tranquillity. The flow of prana in ida and pingala nadis is equalized. The blood system is purified of toxins. This practice balances the activity in the right and left hemispheres of the brain and makes it easier to change the *swara*, or nostril dominance.



Bhastrika Pranayama (bellows breath)

Sit in any comfortable asana with the spine erect and the knees resting on the floor. Close the right nostril and perform 20 rapid respirations through the left nostril. Repeat with the right nostril. Perform the rapid respirations through both nostrils. The nostrils should not expand and contract during the practice, but should be kept rigid.

Benefits: It purifies the lungs by eliminating unwanted carbon dioxide. It relieves inflammation of the throat and increases the gastric fire. It is an effective exercise for the relief and elimination of many lung, throat and chest diseases. It increases the heat in the body.

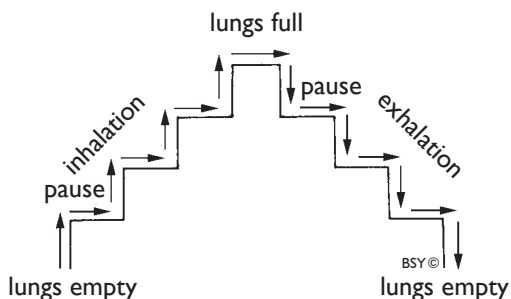
Kapalbhati Pranayama (stimulating breath)

Sit in any comfortable seated posture with the head and spine straight and the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, expanding the



abdomen, and exhale with a forceful contraction of the abdominal muscles. Do not strain. The next inhalation takes place by passively allowing the abdominal muscles to expand slowly and deeply. Inhalation should be a spontaneous or passive recoil, involving no effort.

Variation: Another variation of this pranayama or breath control practice is called step breathing. This is where the staggered breath is done on both the inhalation and exhalation. Inhale – pause, inhale – pause, inhale – pause, inhale – pause to the top of the stairs. Then exhale – pause, exhale – pause, exhale – pause, exhale – pause back down again.



Perform 10 respirations to begin with. Count each respiration mentally. After completing 10 rapid breaths in succession, inhale and exhale deeply. This is one round. Practise 3 to 5 rounds.

Precaution: If pain or dizziness is experienced, stop the practice and sit quietly for some time. When the sensation has passed, begin again with total awareness and less force.

Benefits: Kapalbhati removes sensory distractions from the mind. It is used to energize the mind for mental work, to remove sleepiness and to prepare the mind for absorption. It has a similar cleansing effect on the lungs to bhastrika and is therefore a good practice for asthmatics and those suffering from emphysema, bronchitis and tuberculosis. It balances and strengthens the nervous system and tones the digestive organs.

Contra-indications: This pranayama should not be practised by those suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure, vertigo, epilepsy, stroke, hernia or gastric ulcers.



Bhramari Pranayama (humming bee breath)

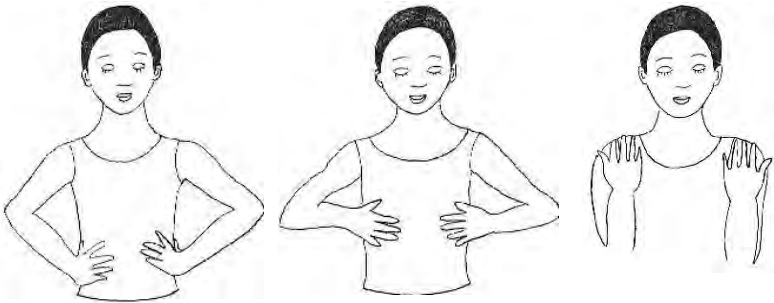
Sit in any comfortable asana with the spine erect and the knees resting on the floor. Inhale fully through both nostrils. Plug the ears with the index fingers. With the teeth apart and the mouth closed, exhale completely while producing a humming sound like that of a bee. Exhalation should be slow and steady with concentration on the humming sound.

Benefits: Cerebral tension caused by anger is relieved. It is beneficial for people with high blood pressure caused by mental agitation and is very good for the vocal cords. It helps to relieve nervous tensions and anxiety.



Ha Breathing

Lie in shavasana with the eyes gently closed. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nostrils while stretching the arms out on the floor behind the head. While breathing out quickly through the mouth, bend the knees up against the chest, hugging both legs close to the body. Inhale again slowly, while straightening the legs back to the floor and stretching the arms above the head again. If necessary, take a few natural breaths before repeating the quick exhalation. Repeat the quick exhalations 3 times. Then while exhaling slowly, return the arms to the sides, resuming shavasana and relaxing.



Ha Ha Ha Breathing

Step 1: Stand with the hands resting against the sides of the body at the level of the floating ribs, at about waist level. As you are breathing in, feel the lower ribs expanding. While breathing out, press gently with the hands. Inhale slowly and exhale while pressing gently. Bending forward a little at the waist helps to expel the air.

Step 2: Bring your hands up level with the middle of the rib cage. Inhale, expand the chest and press gently while exhaling, bending slightly more forward than previously.

Step 3: Put your hands on the upper part of the chest in front of the shoulders. Inhale and press gently while exhaling at the same time, bending slightly forward.

Step 4: Practise all three together. Inhale, with the hands moving quickly on either side of the rib cage. Exhale by shouting HA, bending slightly forward and pressing shout HA, bending further forward pressing and HA. There the hands drop down and the head remains down. This is very good for the brain. Inhale slowly, starting with the head down, then raise upright and repeat the HA-HA-HA exercise again, dropping the hands and head down at the end.

Sheetali Pranayama (cooling breath)

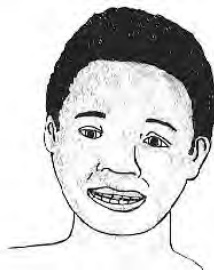
Sit in any comfortable asana with the spine erect and both knees resting on the floor. Place the hands on the knees. With the tongue stretched out, fold the sides of the tongue into a tube. Inhale forcefully but steadily through the funnelled tongue as though trying to swallow air into the stomach. Release the tongue, close the mouth and exhale through the nose.



Benefits: This purifies the blood and prevents and relieves high blood pressure. It induces mental, psychic and muscular calmness and eliminates the feeling of thirst.

Sheetkari Pranayama (cooling breath)

Sit in any comfortable asana with the spine erect and both knees resting on the floor. Fold the tongue back and place it against the palate. Clench the teeth together and separate the lips as far apart as possible. Inhale by drawing



the breath in through the teeth. Close the lips and exhale slowly through the nose.

Benefits: It has the same effects and benefits as sheetali pranayama.



Ujjayi Pranayama (deep sleep breath)

Sit in a comfortable posture and relax the whole body. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand fully. Try to breathe so slowly that little or no sound of the breath can be heard. Feel the air reaching into the bottom of the lungs.

At the end of abdominal expansion, start to expand the chest outward and upward. When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collarbone should also move up slightly. Some tensions will be felt in the neck muscles. The rest of the body should be relaxed. Feel the air filling the upper lobes of the lungs.

This completes one inhalation, with the whole process being one continuous movement, each phase merging into the next.

Pause with the breath inside, then begin exhaling, letting the shoulders relax, then the chest move downward and

inward, and finally emptying the lungs completely, feeling as if the navel is going to meet the backbone.

Again while exhaling, the entire movement should be harmonious and flowing.

Pause again before starting the second inhalation.

As the breathing becomes slower and deeper, gently contract the glottis so that a soft snoring sound, like the breathing of a sleeping baby is heard.

Practise yogic breathing while concentrating on the sound produced by the breath in the throat.

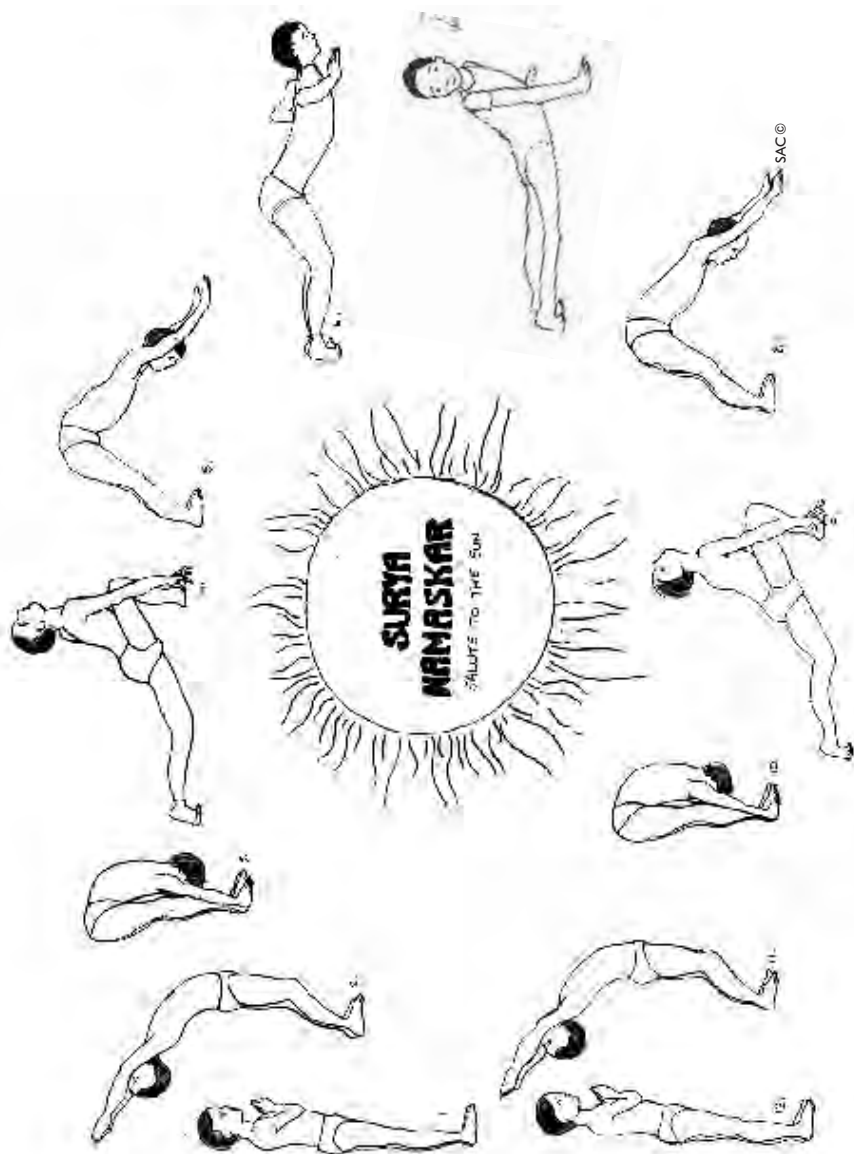
Begin with 5 to 10 rounds and with practice increase to ten minutes or eventually a complete mala of 108 rounds.

MUDRA



Pranam Mudra (gesture of prayer)

Bring the palms of the hands together at the heart level of the chest.



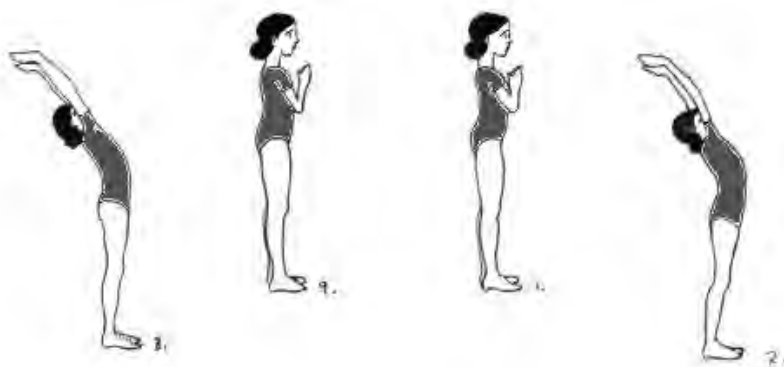
Appendix II



CHANDRA SEQUENCE



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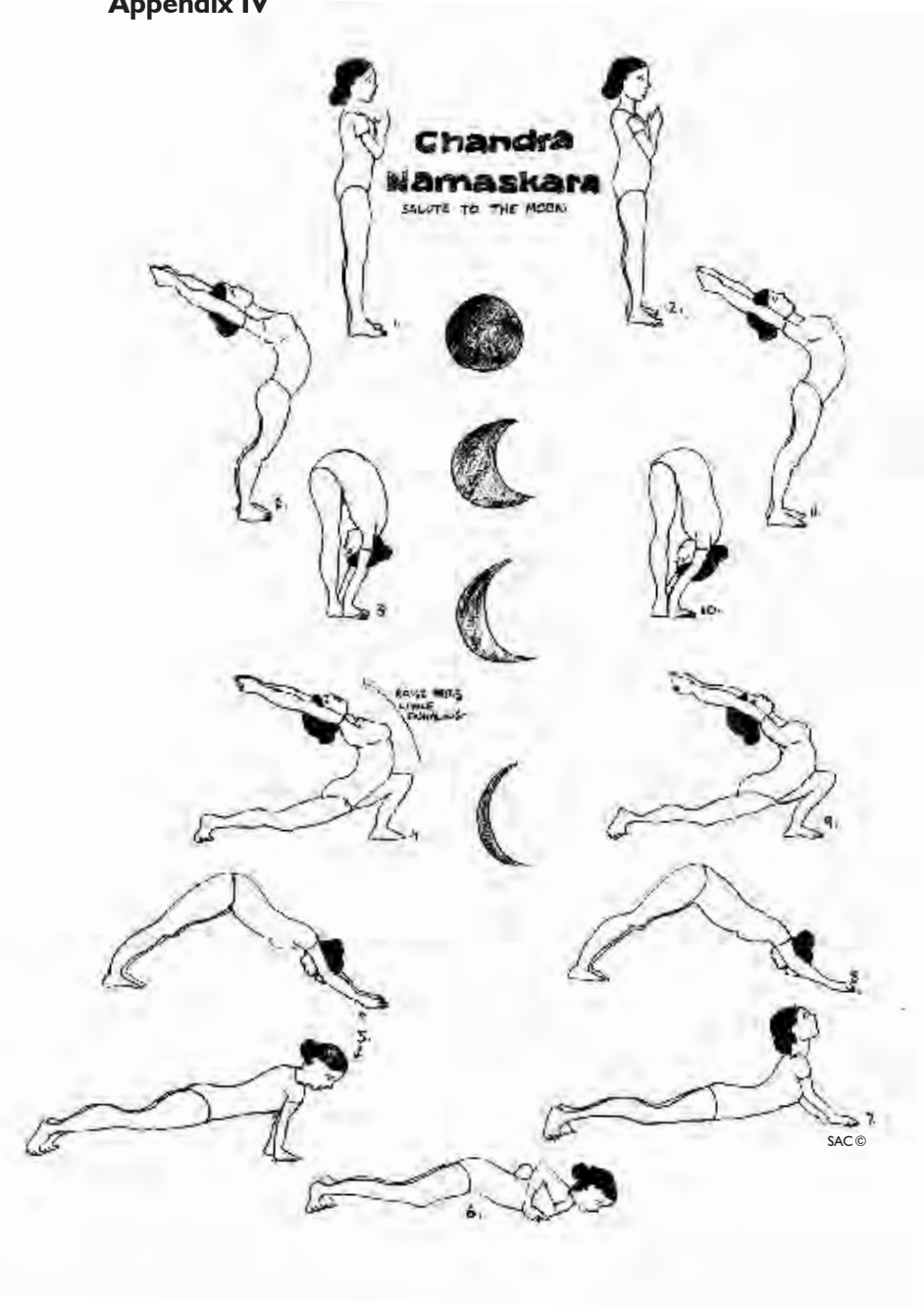
Ardha Chandra Namaskara



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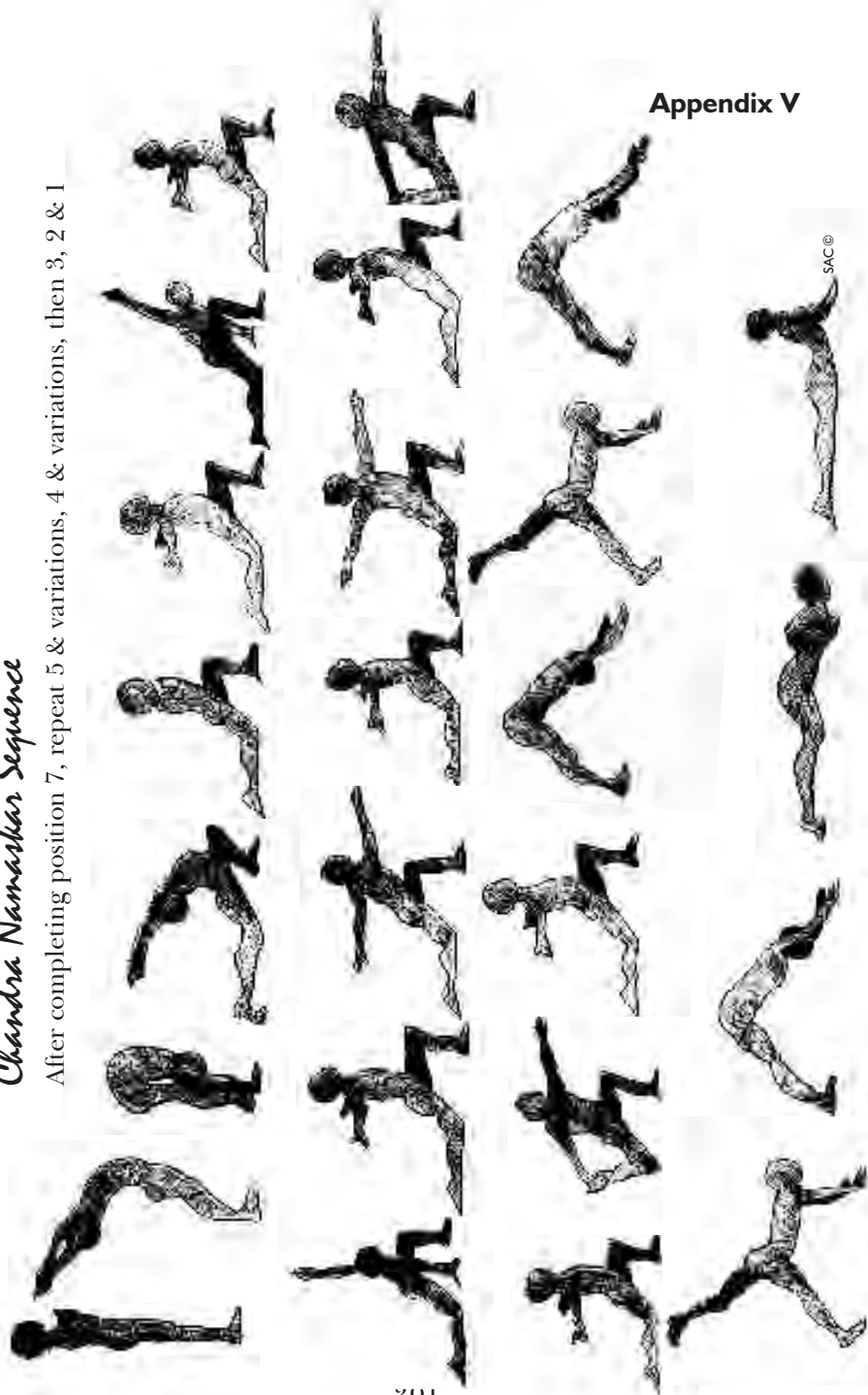


Appendix IV



Chandra Namaskar Sequence

After completing position 7, repeat 5 & variations, 4 & variations, then 3, 2 & 1



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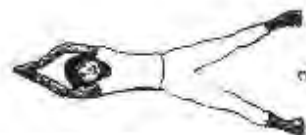
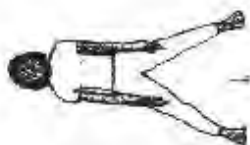


Warrior Sequence : Level 1

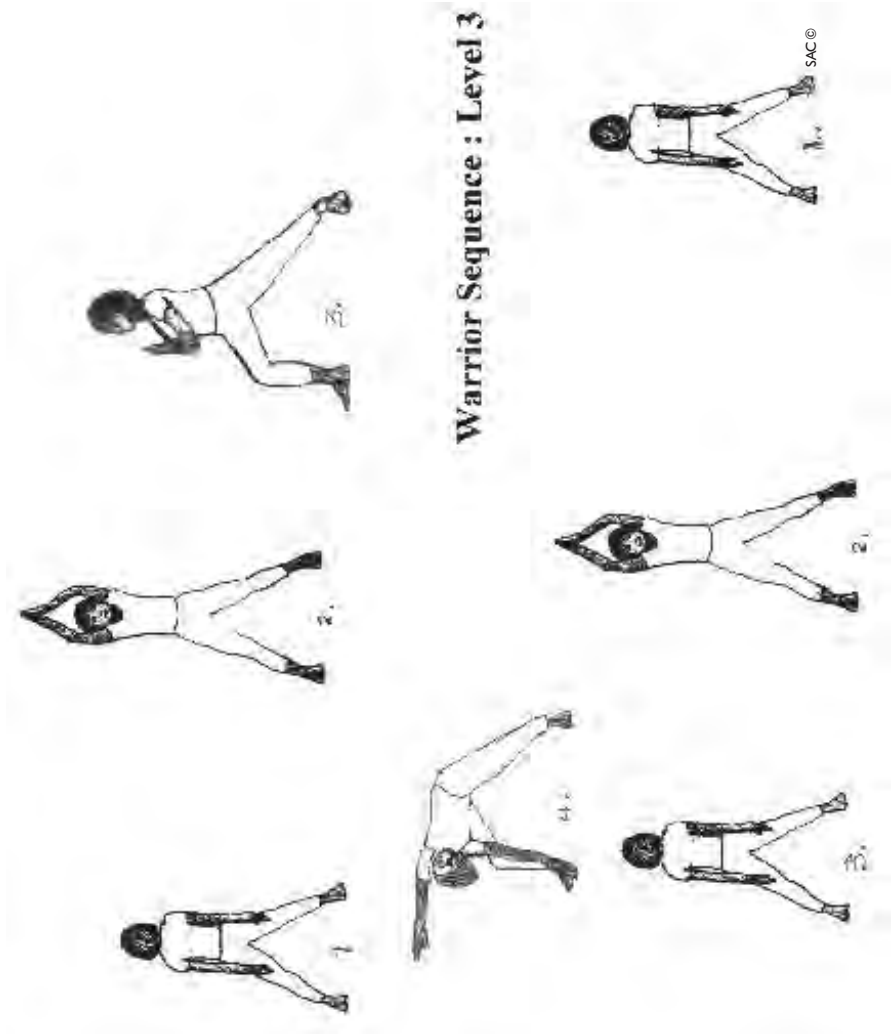


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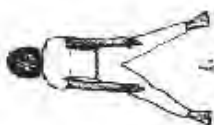
Warrior Sequence : Level 2



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Warrior Sequence : Level 4

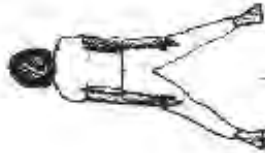


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Warrior Sequence : Level 5



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Notes

Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

Yoga Education for Children, Volume Two is designed to stimulate those who work or interact with children to be creative in their use of yoga practices, empowering children to become creative, emotionally stable citizens of the future. The first two sections look at the real goal of education, which begins before a child is born, and yoga in special needs education. The third section presents two highly successful experiments in youth empowerment in India: Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal in Munger and the kanya and batuk project in Rikhiapeth. The fourth section includes a detailed presentation of asana and pranayama techniques and their use in a wide variety of contexts with children of all ages: games, art sessions, yoga nidra and other meditations, to stimulate interest and imagination, facilitate easier learning and, most of all, introduce fun into the whole process of yoga for children.

Line diagrams and illustrations are included.



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